The Contravoxai Survivor

By

Alexander Gordon Jahans

It wasn't a surprise when the world ended. The surprise was that humanity didn't.

Our world was dying, climate change and advanced warfare had seen to that. What really killed it, really killed our civilisation was greed. The 1% hoarding all the money as the masses starved and committed suicide or worked themselves to death just to keep living one day more.

When the aliens came it wasn't even a fight. We were so weak and the 1% so few. They descended upon us without mercy. They took every last man, woman or child and anyone who threw so much as a punch was devoured. The Americans thought their guns would save them. They were wrong.

We wondered why. We wondered how. These things had come from god knows where and they were here now and they were killing so many. Why? It made no sense. toddlers swallowed whole, grown men and women torn apart and devoured. They were these great monstrous things with eight legs and tentacles and rings of eyeballs on storks stacked 5 deep round their heads.

Then those of us who survived understood. We were herded up into cages then processed by Contravoxai, we would be stripped and washed and branded then sorted into different cages. The old were kept with the children, to look after them. The young were kept together but separate from the rest, they were allowed to copulate then the pregnant women were pulled out into breeding chambers. Anyone who was deemed to be mature but not old was put into the so-called factory cages, so-called because this was where people became products to be consumed.

I guess I was lucky really, I was one of the first to go, I didn't fully know of the horror that waited in store for me and I didn't really have long to think about it. I was there maybe half an hour when I was chosen by their Vligury.

The Vligury are the native human or humanoid species that live with the Contravoxai. They speak an alien language and seem to be able to communicate with the Contravoxai. They have a civilisation that the Contravoxai are content to support so long as the Vligury remain their loyal servants and cattle. I didn't see much of it but I know the Vligury are the preferred cattle of the Contravoxai. Obviously Vligury aren't the most efficient forms of cattle but something tells me that that's missing the point.

In any case I recognised her because she was stunningly beautiful, especially compared to the terrified masses around her. In the land of the scared the serene possess an otherworldly beauty. She also carried a mass of fibrous, almost naturally grown and harvested, rope.

She didn't try to fight me. She didn't need to. If I said no, if I tried to stop her she would simply move onto the next and then the next until she found someone sick of waiting, sick of the not knowing.

I wasn't really thinking. I tried to speak to her and she grabbed my hands. I let her. I wasn't about to hit her for the privilege of remaining in this crap hole. This act of supplication meant she felt confident enough in her ability to control me that she pulled my hands behind my back and bound them. She pulled remaining rope between my legs and held the end like a leash as she started walking ahead of me.

I was led out of the factory cage and two large Vligury flanked me with bone crafted weapons. At this point the Vligury who had bound my hands was replaced by an old male Vligury and I was led through the bowels of the great ship to an antechamber with Contravoxai guards. My Vligury escort was sent away. Now I had time to think and the knowledge that I had nowhere to go.

There was a whooping cry and a blonde woman fell before me. She laughed and said “Sorry” to the guards.

I was astonished. “You’re human? You’re English?”

She laughed and leaned in to me, there was this air of excited euphoria about her, as if this was all one mad game. It faltered for a second when she looked into my eyes then she kissed me on the lips and said. “Trust me.”

I nodded.

She kissed my neck and for a moment I felt something like a scratch.

A short Contravoxai approached and seemed to stare at the blonde woman. It communicated in its alien language with her then she said to me. “Sorry, my keeper is rather wondering where his lunch has gotten to. Enjoy your consumption.”

Then she walked off with the Contravoxai.

A tall Contravoxai with a few eyeballs missing came for me next. Fresh bindings of rope were applied to my hands and then my feet. I was then hung upside down by the rope and dangled over the top of a table where four Contravoxai sat in talks.

There were two other humans strung up beside me. One was tall and of African descent and missing both his arms and his lower jaw. He had a haunted expression. An average height overweight woman was silent and missing an arm, an ear and her eyes.

A fourth human pinata was strung up over the table. Short, ginger and cute, I felt an instinctual urge to protect her. She said “Hi” and a tentacle whipped upwards and tore out her lower jaw and tongue. After that her death was relatively quick as the Contravoxai at the table whipped their tentacles up in quick succession to tear something off her until her organs spilled onto the table and her legs too were snatched away.

I’m not sure how long I lasted there, being slowly whittled away piece by piece but 10 were devoured before I lost both my eyes and ears. Thankfully it wasn’t long after that that I blacked out.

I woke back to consciousness to find the blonde woman from before, when I was waiting for my turn, looking over me.

She held her finger to her lips and whispered. “Call me Sammy.”

I tried to nod but found I could not, I was paralysed.

“Drink.” said Sammy then liquid was filling my mouth.

I drank. It felt fantastic, like the waters of life were coursing through me.

“Now, sleep.” said Sammy

So, I slept.

When I woke I felt renewed. I wiggled my fingers and toes, I had them. I felt overjoyed.

Then I heard her voice and I wanted to cry out. She was giggling not far away.

I felt something sharp against my throat and a manly voice hissed. “Keep quiet and we’ll get you out of here, and give you an explanation but keep schtum.”

I swallowed.

“Good boy.” hissed the voice.

There was a sound of screaming then something landed in my lap.

A blonde woman strode off towards the distance and I heard her squeal with pleasure.

Something bit the inside of my leg and I looked down to see that what had handed in my lap was the head and torso of Sammy. Her eyes and ears removed.

I was horrified.

“Easy fella...” said the male voice gently. “She can heal. Give her a tickle under the chin, let her know you’re there.”

I reached out and tentatively tickled the disfigured woman under the chin.

She grinned. “Hey, it’s my damsel in distress. Hang tight, yeah, we’ll keep you safe.”

There was the sound of screaming followed by a splat.

Another blonde woman got up and walked off towards the sound.

I said. “I trust you.”

Sammy said. “Master, knock him out, we’ll talk later.”

I looked down at her, confused.

Then I was gone.

I woke to find Sammy straddling me. My mouth dropped open in shock.

“Keeper’s at a game.” said Sammy. “He took a few of us with him but, for now, those that remain can talk.”

“Right.” I breathed. “Well, I’m Steve.”

“Nice to meet you, Steve.” said Sammy, then she rolled off of me.

A blonde woman sat in one corner and waved. “Carla.”

A blonde woman in a different corner waved. “Lisa”

Then a man coughed. “Anthony Maxwell Jago at your service. I do hope you like my girls.”

I stared at him. “What is this? What’s going on?”

Anthony thought for a long moment then said. “We’re weresharks and that means we can heal. We are also Sylphs and that means we are submissive and like pain. We are the Leader of the Contravoxai’s pride and joy, his own personal banquet, ready to be enjoyed time and time again.”

“We also have sex.” said Lisa.

“An awful lot of sex.” said Carla.

Sammy chuckled. “He’s mine, I saw him first, I saved his life.”

Lisa and Carla looked visibly upset.

“Yes?” said Anthony. “And in so doing you have threatened us all. Where the heck are we going to find a sylph pill around here?”

Sammy said. “But we have Lucy?”

Anthony glared at her. “The blood of a Sylph can only sustain him for so long, we can only hide him for so long. We need to turn him. We need a Sylph pill or we need a Sylph that is willing to be blood bonded to him.”

“But he’s cute.” said Sammy. “And we need an extra dick around here.”

“I don’t want to kill him.” said Anthony. “But we can’t just release a wereshark onto the populace. He needs to control his urges or he’s toast.”

I spoke up. “Hold on, you said you can’t hide me forever? Well it seems like I could hide a while in the cages where they’re holding people. We all could.”

Anthony stared at him. “We aren’t leaving and I’m not letting you go alone.”

“He won’t have to.” said Sammy. “I volunteer.”

Anthony looked visibly winded. “You’ll be missed. The Leader may be complacent and lazy but he isn’t completely stupid. You’ll be rounded up in an instant.”

“Do you forget how you came to be here and survived to be Sheriff of Choice World?” said Sammy “We’ve got three hearts and we only need one of them to beat to heal.”

Anthony frowned.

Carla said. “I’ll go too, I trust Sammy’s judgement.”

Sammy and Carla each looked at Lisa.

Lisa sighed. “Fine, but I want regular fucking and to continue being torn apart. I kind of like it.”

“We all kind of like it.” said Carla pointedly. “It’s why we’ve spent the past hundred years with the Leader.”

Lisa smirked.

Anthony said. “Supposing you can do this, supposing I let you do this, you will be travelling around with an amoral monster time bomb through a crowded area and once one drop of wereshark blood mixes with a drop of human blood you will have a wereshark virus spreading throughout the human and Vligury populace. I need to know you can defuse that timebomb. I need to know you can kill him.”

Lisa and Carla looked at each other and then at Sammy.

Sammy looked me in the eyes. “To save your life, I have to be able to end it.”

Anthony said. “You can’t can you? All three of you are here because I took you for my own, because you are submissive, obedient and sweet. Even Lucy, though she’s a warrior, is inclined towards submissiveness, she won’t be able to.”

I said. “Hey, hold up.”

Anthony stared at me. “Yes?”

I said. “These people may not be able to kill me but the Contravoxai sure can, and the Vligury, and I’m sure many of the humans if its explained to them.”

Anthony sighed. “You make a good point. Very well, we will plan. Carla, keep him busy.”

Carla approached and straddled me.

The world was lost to me as Carla became my world.

When Carla rolled off of me Anthony was reaching into Sammy’s chest. He pulled out her heart out and snapped the veins free then he placed it in a hiding space beneath some floorboards.

Lisa applied pressure to the hole in Sammy’s chest and her hair and back was used to clean Anthony’s hands.

Anthony strode over to me and said. “You’ll stay with us until she’s ready, then you’ll make your break

for it with her. On the day of the event I'll gather up the hearts of all who are willing to go with you and they will aid you as soon as they are ready."

Then I was gone from the world.

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A couple of days later this new Sammy was shown to me. She had grown in secret under the floorboards of the cage and she greeted me with an excited smile. "We're going to break you out of here? How exciting."

Her enthusiasm was infectious. "How?"

"The guards like me." said Sammy casually. "I put on a show and I usually let them have a cheeky nibble. Of course we'll need a distraction but the others have that covered, just stick close, trust me and obey me."

I nodded.

Some Contravoxai arrived to escort us to the main hall for the Leader's banquet and we managed to lose ourselves among Anthonys girls so we wouldn't be found out.

We were led through a washing shower, a marinade bathing and onto a hot plate.

Clara and Lisa provided cover for us.

When we were on the plate the Sammy who would stay behind headed over to us. She kissed her double then she hugged me and said. "Look after us, my boy, and if you get out of here, try to send word back about the route to safety, yeah?"

I nodded. "Of course."

Then she snogged me and left.

Anthony handed me a leather sack tied up with string. "I got what I could. Good luck."

I nodded curtly and shook his hand.

Then we waited.

We heard giggling from the Sammy who would be left behind and then she shrieked and was launched across the hall.

My Sammy grabbed my hand and we rolled off the plate.

We got to our feet and Sammy led us over to a guard. She looked guilty as sin.

The Contravoxai took one look at her then extended a tentacle to caress her face.

Sammy blushed and said. “I know it was wrong but he’s just so cute, I had to.”

The Contravoxai pulled her close to it and its tentacles examined the contours of her body.

Sammy giggled. “I don’t think your Leader will like you messing with me.”

The Contravoxai seemed to shudder and its tentacles gripped her right ear and left arm firmly. “You let me have what I want and I’ll let you put your boy back where he belongs.”

Sammy chuckled and massaged a tentacle. “I need to be able to walk, remember?”

The Contravoxai seemed to take this in because it readjusted its grip, lifted her off the ground and held her more securely. Then it tore at her.

Sammy was lowered gently to the ground, her arms missing, a few internal organs gone and both ears absent.

“Thank you.” said Sammy sweetly.

I followed her swiftly past the guard.

Sammy led us to the Vligury guards.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here then?” asked a taller male Vligury mockingly.

“I tried to rescue him.” said Sammy with a laugh. “Didn’t exactly go well for me.”

“Alright.” said the Vligury. “But don’t let me catch you out of bounds again. Now go on, factory cage, quick as you like.”

Sammy nodded.

We hurriedly made it inside a factory cage and Sammy was noticeably disturbed by the conditions.

I found us a quiet place where we wouldn’t be noticed among the filth then we sat and waited.

I idly wondered how we were going to eat but we had bigger problems.

So we talked as she healed, talked about the Contravoxai and the Vligury.

There was something horribly fascinating about watching someone regrow limbs before your very eyes.

When she had healed, she asked. “So what are you going to do when you’re free? I mean you realise you have a small harem now? At least, if you want it?”

I shrugged. “I can’t go home, don’t know where I’ll go. I just want to survive.”

“Surviving’s good.” said Sammy with as nod and then she kissed me.

Before we knew it the bag had split and Lisa, Carla and a ginger haired woman and another blonde haired woman were looking down at us.

“Is this a private party or can anyone join in?” asked the ginger haired woman.

Sammy laughed. “Amy, you should know better than to use that rhetoric around Carla and Lisa.”

Amy raised an eyebrow. “Who’s being rhetorical?”

Carla and Lisa each chuckled.

Them Sammy exclaimed. “Lucy!”

The - as yet not introduced - blonde woman approached and hugged Sammy.

Sammy patted Lucy down then she kicked her legs out from under her and pulled her arms behind her back.

Lucy smirked. “Sammy, I’m in charge now, behave.”

Sammy pulled Lucy’s hair away from her neck and said. “No, Lucy, you behave. You’re medicine.”

Lucy sighed.

Sammy grazed the side of Lucy’s neck with her nails and said. “Drink, Steve.”

So I drank the blood and once again I felt as if the waters of life were rejuvenating me.

I stood back up and went to wipe my mouth clean with the back of my hand but Carla stopped me and wiped my face with Lisa’s hair instead.

Lucy was drowsy after that. “Okay, Sammy, you’re right. I am just medicine, look after me, you’re in charge.”

“Thank you.” said Sammy sweetly. “Now sleep.”

She lowered Lucy to the ground then said. “Carla, watch her. I do not trust her.”

Amy said. “You know if we could just get to a phone we could phone Frederick and have him put us in touch with Anthony and then we’d be quids in.”

“So then what?” asked Lisa. “A hundred years of life just flushed down the drain because ET needed to phone home?”

“Not necessarily.” said Sammy “If we can dose Steve up properly I think I might know someone who could help us, in return for us.”

“But I thought the whole point of this was escaping?” asked Carla bluntly.

“Well he takes enough but never too much.” said Sammy carefully. “And he would, I think, be willing to adventure with us.”

Amy said. “Alright, but how do we get to him? I mean, in case you haven’t noticed, we’re cows in a slaughter house. We can’t just walk up to this mate of yours.”

Sammy frowned.

I said. “Well the Vligury walk through here regularly escorting people out to be eaten. We find one and convince them to escort us out? I mean unless you have a better idea?”

Sammy, Carla, Lisa and Amy shared vacant looks then they stared at me.

“I’m bait, aren’t I?” I said.

“Well these three are the big time.” said Amy by way of explanation. “Don’t worry though, I’ll have your back, I’m not usually such a crowd pleaser so I can do it.”

Sammy hugged me. “Good luck out there.”

The Vligury who had taken me originally was on the hunt again. She recognised me and was visibly furious. “You should be dead.”

I sighed. “Well I’m not”

The Vligury started binding my hands again and I didn’t fight back.

Amy appeared behind the Vligury and picked her up by the ankles.

The Vligury fell forward and I caught her.

We escorted the Vligury over to where Sammy, Carla, Lisa and Lucy were hiding.

Interestingly the Vligury didn’t struggle or fight back, she accepted her fate with serenity.

Carla and Lisa took the Vligury from us.

Amy ran to me and unbound my hands. “This will be useful for Lucy.”

Sammy took my hand and squeezed it then she said. “We don’t wish to hurt you. We just need your help.”

“I won’t help you.” said the Vligury defiantly. “I serve my masters and I am served to my masters, that is the Vligury way.”

Sammy tutted. “Well, I serve a higher master and his name is decency. This man is innocent, his culture is not Vligury.”

“No.” admitted the Vligury. “But his culture will be harvested and the unworthy culled. Only the righteous may join the Vligury.”

“This one gets to live.” said Sammy and she said it with such quiet force that it seemed an end to the conversation.

“May I see who asks this betrayal of me?” asked the Vligury.

Sammy nodded.

Carla and Lisa turned the Vligury onto her back.

Sammy placed her foot on the Vligury’s neck. “Ah, my Eliza”

The Vligury coughed. “Sammy, my girl, what’s happened?”

Sammy glared at her and applied a little more pressure to her throat.

She recognized Carla and Lisa and her expression softened to sorrow.

“Let her breathe.” I said. “I think she’ll talk now.”

Sammy looked me in the eyes then nodded. She removed her foot and said. “You live because of the one that you would let die, be fortunate he is more merciful than you.”

“What are you doing here?” Eliza asked. “The leader will be furious. His wrath will be greater than any good you could do.”

“The Leader knows nothing.” said Sammy “We are cuttings, the originals still dance on his plate.”

“Oh, my dears...” said Eliza sadly. “So you are cattle with nobody to eat you?”

Lisa nodded. “Doesn’t feel right to not have a tentacle pulling at my flesh.”

“Then perhaps I can help you.” said Eliza thoughtfully.

Sammy helped Eliza to her feet.

Eliza brushed the hair from Sammy’s face and stroked her cheek. “My partners run a pub down in the gulletways, they have a friendly homeless Contravoxai who stops by occasionally to eat their garbage and try his luck on the punters. Occasionally they take pity on him and convince a pretty young thing to let him take what he will. Bet it will be like Nigelmass to see you three on his dinner plate.”

“Five.” said Amy as she hauled Lucy over her shoulder.

“Even better.” said Eliza cheerfully then she stroked Amy’s cheek. “If she ever gets heavy, let me know and I’ll have a Contravoxai lighten your load.”

Lisa sighed. “It’s been so long since I’ve had a good eating. Think you can do me up a marinade?”

Eliza laughed and hugged Lisa. “Not only can we do you a marinade, we can do you a spit roast.”

Lisa blushed and smiled.

Carla said. “Don’t get me wrong, it’s awesome that we can have somewhere to lie low and get eaten, but we need to find him a sylph pill.”

Eliza turned to me and studied me like a prize bull, her hands feeling my body with a cold force. “Yes, I can see now. You turned him into a wereshark, didn’t you? I should have known when he could understand me. You realise you’ll have to kill him?”

“No.” said Sammy firmly. “He can drink Lucy’s blood to keep enough Sylph in his system to remain sane while we work on getting him his Sylph pill.”

“Okay...” said Eliza cautiously. “But you are growing some hatchlings for him. If you are going to keep him sane with the blood, you need lots of it.”

“Understood.” said Sammy with a nod. “We just need somewhere we can raise them first.”

“Which means you need to get us out of here.” said Amy bluntly. “How are you going to do that?”

“You’re weresharks, right?” said Eliza curiously. “You can all heal?”

“Well yeah.” said Sammy uncertainly. “What are you planning?”

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Sammy stood over a group of bodies and looked distraught as Eliza led a Contravoxai guard over.

The Contravoxai groaned bitterly. “Sammy, again? What have you done this time?”

“I was just leading this man back to his cage when these ladies caught my eye and I - Well I guess after all the stress they’d been through their poor hearts couldn’t take it.” said Sammy awkwardly. “Oh, I am sorry...”

The Contravoxai sighed and his tentacles lifted the bodies up and dumped them in the large mouth on top of his head.

Sammy looked distraught. “If there is anything I can do, anything?”

The Contravoxai chuckled bitterly. “Yeah, there’s something you can do... You can remember that you live on this ship to be food.”

Sammy looked ashamed. “I know, I just - I like people, I like to make them happy.”

The Contravoxai seemed to soften and his tentacles surrounded Sammy. He stroked her face and asked. “What are we going to do with you, eh?”

Eliza coughed. “Well I know a good bar where we could get Sammy all boozed up for you then a little private area where you could enjoy her in peace. We’d clean up the mess and see she gets home alright.”

The Contravoxai studied Sammy as his tentacles tested her body. How much force would he need to break that bone, to tear that flesh away, to pull that free from its joint...

“I could actually use a drink.” said Sammy coyly.

The Contravoxai chuckled. “Eliza, you’re going to need to remove her liver and kidneys, remember? Weresharks can heal which means this is going to be a fun night.”

Eliza smirked.

Sammy grinned.

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The pub was a large three story thing made with wattle and daub, wood and stone furnishings. There were large cubicles decorated with intricate inlays showing various scenes of Vligury supplicating to and being eaten by Contravoxai. Tables and chairs were arranged about the place and various young men and women sat chatting and drinking different coloured liquids. A few middle aged and old men and women sat about the place either drinking quietly, chatting with friends or watching the young like meerkats on lookout. The most amazing thing to Sammy’s eyes though was that everyone here wore clothes.

The Contravoxai said. “I’m going to find a free cubicle, bring her over when she’s ready.”

“Of course.” said Eliza as she put her arms around Sammy’s shoulders.

There was an old woman in a business suit with brown curly hair behind the bar. She looked Sammy up and down then said. “Eliza, dear, why do we have one of the great Leader’s prized morsels in our establishment?”

Eliza grimaced. “I’ll explain later, trust me. What matters now is that we get this one’s liver and kidneys removed then fill her full of gin.”

The old woman eyed Eliza carefully then opened the hatch.

Eliza led Sammy round.

A few minutes later Sammy was almost carried out of the hatch as alcohol had flooded her system. She was taken to the Contravoxai guard’s booth.

The Contravoxai exhaled with relief. “Now ain’t that a pretty sight, our dear little Sammy too drunk to talk.”

The Contravoxai took Sammy in his tentacles and said. “You can go now.”

Eliza nodded and left, closing the door to the cubical.

The Contravoxai caressed Sammy. It was partly out of some genuine feeling of warmth to one willing to let him eat her but mostly it was so she would be calmed and it would be easier to have his way, it also allowed him to check his previous calculations regarding her muscular and bone strength were still correct.

Sammy smiled at him. “What are you waiting for?”

Two tentacles darted into her mouth as she said ‘for’ and tore Sammy’s lower jaw and tongue away. This was a common courtesy Contravoxai gave when eating in public spaces, it was also a somewhat necessary safety precaution against being deafened by screamers.

There was a moment to breath as the Contravoxai chucked the torn pieces of Sammy’s flesh into his mouth, then he tore her arms and legs off and lowered them slowly into his mouth as he gnashed so they would be finely chewed.

The Contravoxai readjusted his grip on her and tore at her flesh until the ribcage was exposed.

Then the alcohol from Sammy’s body hit his system and he vomited up. Carla, Lisa, Amy, Lucy and I were ejected from the top of his mouth along with a ton of blood, acid, alcohol and bits of partially digested flesh.

The door was yanked open and the old woman in the business suit stood before the Contravoxai holding some kind of big gun. “Right, you drunk fuck, get out of my pub!”

The Contravoxai stared at her. “Is- Is that a plasma rifle? Where did you get that?”

“I’m a pub landlord, I know people. Now, get tae fuck!” said the old woman as she placed the barrel right up against one of his eyeballs.

The Contravoxai screamed.

The pub landlord backed off.

The Contravoxai ran.

“You tell your Contravoxai mates ‘Helga Meyer is not to be messed with’, understood!?” cried the pub landlord after him.

Eliza appeared, she was wearing a knee length skirt with a floral design and a croptop with some Vligury slogan on it. “Are you all okay?”

“Except for Sammy.” I said.

Eliza smirked and started collecting what remained of Sammy up.

“She’ll be fine.” said the pub landlord dismissively. “Bit of rest is all she needs. As for you lot, you are getting a shower. No ifs. No buts.”

Amy laughed. “I don’t think you’re going to get any disagreement from us.”

“You saved us.” I said, relieved. “Thank you”

I got to my feet.

The pub landlord looked me in the eye. “I saved you because I trust Eliza, and because as I understand your little rescue party still wants to be eaten and I can make a pretty penny off that.”

“Well thank you anyway” I said disarmingly.

The pub landlord nodded. “I’ll have a bed made up for you in one of the guest rooms but you will have to earn your keep, you understand?”

“Fine.” I said with a nod.

“Then what do I call you, boy?” asked the pub landlord.

“Steve.” I said cheerfully. “Steve Banks”

“Well, Steve, you may call me Helga, but be warned if you ever look like hurting anybody I care about I will put you down.” said the pub landlord.

I nodded.

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I stepped out of the shower and made to fetch a towel when someone coughed.

Eliza had waited by the door and she held a bunch of clothes with some smart shoes on top. “You aren’t bad a looker when you’re clean.”

I frowned. “Well, I’m glad you approve.”

“I’ve got a suit for you.” said Eliza. “Helga’s gotten very good at sizing people up given her line of work but let me know if anything doesn’t fit.”

“Cheers.” I said and I walked over to accept the clothes.

“Your room is number 7 on the third floor.” said Eliza as she added a key to the pile.

“Awesome.” I said.

I was about to take the clothes and go when she said. “Be careful out there.”

“What?” I asked.

“We’re Vligury.” said Eliza carefully. “And our clientelle includes Contravoxai, they can be a little

enthusiastic at times. I know you can heal but you aren't a Sylph. It won't be fun."

"Understood." I said with a grimace.

She gave me a curious look, distant but concerned. I wondered what it meant.

Then Lisa exited her shower cubicle and went for a towel.

Eliza smiled suddenly and strode over to Lisa.

Lisa looked at Eliza curiously.

Eliza asked brightly. "You ready for a marinade?"

Lisa's eyes lit up. "You're serious?"

"And we've got a nice hot fire up there just waiting for something to roast." said Eliza cautiously. "If, that is, you are still up for it?"

Lisa laughed then said. "Thank you. I hope I'm up to your usual standards."

Eliza smirked and booped Lisa's nose. "Get marinading. When you've had a good soak I'll come and take you upstairs."

Lisa nodded. "Will do and, hey, feel free to take a slice for yourself. I recommend the buttocks."

Eliza rolled her eyes.

Lisa noticed me and said. "Hey, you're okay. What are you going to do?"

I shrugged.

"Well, this is a Vligury bar." reasoned Lisa carefully. "Chicks here have been raised to accept being eaten alive at 25, worth trying your luck I reckon."

Then she tilted her head and looked at me with some curiosity. "Or you could always wait until after I've recovered from my turn on the spit?"

I swallowed and said. "Well, good luck with the whole 'spit' thing. I'm gonna... Go." Then I left the room.

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I approached the main bar on the ground floor when I had dressed. A nice three piece suit. It felt good to wear clothes again.

Helga was waiting beside the bar and talking to Sammy. She seemed to have fully healed and was wearing a plain white shirt and a short skirt.

Sammy seemed to see me as I approached and Helga turned to look at me.

“Ah, Steven.” Helga said cheerfully. “Sammy was just filling me in on the events that led to here, you are a very lucky man.”

“Well, I don’t feel lucky.” I said bluntly. “I actually feel like I could do with a stiff drink.”

Helga poured one out and handed it to me.

I stared at her.

Helga said. “Your world was ravaged by the Contravoxai, everyone you have ever known is dying, dead or about to die, your culture as you know it is at an end, you were captured, stripped against your will, imprisoned, eaten alive and now you’re infected with an evil thing that can only be kept at bay by drinking the blood of another. I’d say you deserve a drink.”

“Thank you.” I said awkwardly and raised the glass to my lips. I took a small sip and I wanted to gag as the taste overwhelmed me.

Helga chuckled. “Contravoxian Passthrough Brandy. This is the shit you give to some poor soul about to be enjoyed by a Contravoxai so the Contravoxai gets drunk.”

Sammy smirked. “It’s got quite the kick, hasn’t it?”

I nodded then asked. “So what happens if this makes me pass out?”

“I’ll have Merle carry you to your room.” said Helga with a smile. “Don’t worry, you’ve got friends here.”

“Who’s Merle?” I asked, then I braved another sip of the foul liquid.

Helga smirked. “He’s the Contravoxai who’s going to be eating this lovely lady tonight.” She tickled Sammy’s chin.

Sammy giggled.

Helga put her hands on the table and leaned in to speak to me. “He’s old, wounded, we think he’s a veteran of some kind. Poor guy doesn’t have a home or a job so we give him what we can. He survives on the cultured beef we give him every day but... He’s a Contravoxai. He shouldn’t be slumming it on vat grown meat. So I do what I can for him, when I can bare it.”

Helga leaned back and sighed. “He’s helpful, a real nice guy. Hell, Contravoxai are like superheroes compared to us, so having one round who isn’t likely to eat the neighbourhood is just smart.”

“Well, today Merle’s going to be very happy” said Sammy with a smile.

I took a gulp of brandy and grimaced at the after taste then I asked. “Why? Why do you do it? We’re supposed to be escaping and you’re just ‘Ooh Mister Contravoxai, won’t you tear off my limbs?’ What is wrong with you?”

Helga stared at me, horrified.

Sammy just shrugged then said. “I like it. It makes me feel good. The pain makes me go tingly and then I’m just so powerless and it feels nice, like I don’t need to try any more because it’s beyond my control.”

Helga said. “Sammy, why don’t you go get washed for Merle?”

Sammy nodded. “Good idea, look after my boy, won’t you?”

Helga nodded.

Sammy left via the hatch to get showered.

When she had gone Helga leaned into me and whispered. “You realise it is her and the others being eaten that is paying for your stay here, right?”

I looked her right in her eyes and had another drink.

Carla arrived as I shuddered. She was dressed in a backless little black dress and said “Eliza told me you wanted me.”

Helga smiled when she saw her. “The great Carla. You know I’m a big fan, never guessed that I’d get to order you about.”

Carla smiled and looked away shyly. “Well you know me and Lisa aren’t really that big into monogamy...”

Helga blushed then said. “You know Lisa’s getting spitroasted?”

Carla stared at her.

Helga clarified. “Literally. Big stick through her as she rotates over an open flame.”

“Aww...” said Carla wisfully. “She loves that. I’ll have to stop by and have a slice of her later.”

Helga nodded then said. “You know we could set up a second spit if you wanted to join her?”

Carla frowned. “I’m really more of a... Not being spitroasted, kind of girl? I mean I could do if you really wanted me too but...”

“Relax.” said Helga gently. “It was just a suggestion.”

“Then why do you want me?” asked Carla curiously.

“There’s a Contravoxai coming over called Merle, he’s a good guy.” said Helga carefully. “Sammy’s going to be the main course, I thought you might be the drink?”

Carla nodded. “Me and Sammy do go well together, so I’m told. What am I drinking?”

“Cider.” said Helga as she handed a pint to her. “Take a seat on a stool and keep drinking what I put in front of you. I’ll see that you don’t have too much and deliver you to him when its time.”

“Hang on.” said Carla with a frown. “If I’m to be eaten, why am I wearing clothes? Do you not want this dress?”

“It comes off very easily.” said Helga with a smile.

Carla smirked. “Good to know.”

Helga and Carla shared a moment as they looked into each other’s eyes. Then Amy arrived and Carla took a sip of her cider.

Amy was dressed in a black suit.

I found myself staring at Amy and took a gulp of brandy as the memory of her naked body flashed before my eyes.

Helga moved to address Amy. “I see you found your room alright, how are you?”

Amy sighed. “Well I’m a clone of a clone and I’m on the run with a man I don’t know to do something I don’t know about, so pretty good.”

Helga smirked. “How do you feel about the Contravoxai?”

“Well they’re good at what I do.” said Amy with a shrug. “I’m just not sure I like what they do. Where do you want me?”

Helga asked seriously. “Do you feel up to being eaten?”

Amy said uncertainly. “I’d rather not, why?”

“You can heal.” said Helga bluntly. “The boys and girls who drink here can’t. If you can just intercept any hungry Contravoxai you can save lives. I’ll let you eat and drink whatever you like.”

Amy smirked. “I think I can do that.”

“Good.” said Helga cheerfully. “Then be on your way. I recommend working the second floor. I mean Carla’s here and Lisa’s on the third.”

“What’s she doing?” asked Amy curiously.

“Rotating slowly over a fire as people carve chunks off her.” said Helga wryly.

“Oh, that’s good. She’s always happy after that.” said Amy happily. “I’ll be on my way then.”

Amy left as Lucy arrived.

Lucy wore her long blonde hair tied back in a ponytail, a short black skirt and a crop top. She looked considerably pissed. “Excuse me, landlord, a word in your ear, if you please?”

Helga nodded. “What seems to be the problem?”

“The problem is that I am Lucy Danse, Heir to the Farsh-nuke, Saviour of the multiverse and the woman who is commanding every battlefield the United Civilisations of the Multiverse fight on and I am dressed like some prick’s wet dream.” said Lucy angrily.

Helga nodded then said. “That is because you aren’t any of those things now. You are Lucy McSylphBlood and you quite literally owe your very existence to letting this boy here drink your blood.”

Lucy grimaced. “I don’t need to dress for upskirt shots to have my throat ripped out.”

“No, but you do if you’re going to be pumping out eggs so you aren’t continually drained of blood.” said Helga pointedly. “Now you get behind this bar and do as you’re told.”

Lucy stared at Helga, all rage and fury. Then she seemed to crumble and slumped as the badass paragon of virtue gave way to the scared little Sylph who just wanted her mistress to comfort her. “Alright, so long as the other’s trust you, I’ll trust you.” Lucy snorted. “I don’t even have a collar any more and my owner, owners, are far away from me. I just don’t want the girls hurt. They’re my family you know? They’re all I’ve got left. And now I can’t even get eaten by a Contravoxai.”

Helga reached over and stroked her cheek. “Well, while you’re here, I’ll look after you, okay?”

Lucy nodded then she vaulted the bar and landed beside Helga. “Just treat me like I’m a puppy and we’ll be okay.”

Helga smirked then stroked Lucy’s hair and whistled.

Lucy swallowed.

Helga whistled again.

Lucy closed her eyes for a moment then her hand reached under her skirt and pulled out an egg. Her hands shaking, she gave it to Helga.

“Thank you.” said Helga and she placed the egg in a basket behind the bar.

Some time passed during which Lucy laid 5 more eggs, Carla drank 2 pints of cider and I finished my brandy. This may actually equate with my loss of time.

Anyway time came in to focus for me when Eliza arrived with Sammy.

Sammy wore a strapless red dress, and maybe it was the brandy or the renewed sanity granted by time but, I swear in that moment I fell in love with her. The long blonde hair, those delicate fingers, those beautiful feet and that smile. That gorgeous excited smile, like this was all a game and she was

winning.

Eliza twirled Sammy like a dancer to show her off now she'd been cleaned and dressed.

Sammy giggled, her laughter music to my ears.

Eliza smiled proudly. "Think Merle will like her?"

Helga grinned and grabbed Eliza's arms. "My dear, right now, I could eat her."

Sammy blushed.

Eliza looked Helga in the eyes, obviously basking in the approval.

Helga caught herself and placed her arms by her sides. "Really, well done."

"You could, you know, eat me?" asked Sammy shyly. "I don't mind, really."

Helga laughed.

Eliza took up a stool beside me and we watched them. We watched Helga examine Sammy like a prize poodle.

"Pathetic, isn't it?" said Eliza with a scowl.

"Absolutely" I said.

Then we both sighed.

The door opened and you could see the faces of people as they saw what entered and gasped in horror.

We turned to look, me and Eliza.

It was a shambling thing, a good half of its eyes were popped, bleeding, missing or blind. A number of its tentacles were missing and some of the tentacles it did have dragged along behind it limply. It was even dragging its rump along the ground since its back legs didn't work.

"Merle!" cried Helga enthusiastically as she clapped her hands. "So good to see you."

Eliza shuddered as he approached.

Merle raised some of his tentacles in a half hearted wave. "Helga... don't mind... if I... come in, out of the cold... do you?" He wheezed a lot. "Just... one... glass of water..."

Helga shook her head.

"Oh..." said Merle, looking somehow even more downcast than before. "Okay..."

Merle started to slowly turn.

“You’re not having a glass of water because I have got you a banquet” said Helga gleefully.

Merle seemed to hunker down for a moment then he took a long breath. “You don’t... need... to keep... doing this... Helga. Their lives... are worth... more than mine.”

Sammy ran before Merle. “Oi! Big boy! You think I came all this way for you to turn me down!?”

Merle seemed to stand to attention. “Sammy?”

Sammy grinned, “All yours, big boy.”

Merle stared at her. “What? Why?”

Sammy ran up to Merle and wrapped her arms about him. “Because you are worth it”

Sammy kissed him and looked up at his eyes.

Merle ran a tentacle over her cheek. “Really?”

“Really.” said Sammy with utter sincerity as she grabbed the tentacle that was stroking her and held it to her cheek. “I am yours.”

Merle reached out with another tentacle and stroked the other side of her cheek then down her hair and back until it found her bum where it rested and others gathered.

Sammy leaned back into the seat of tentacles and stretched out her arms.

Merle’s tentacles wrapped themselves around her arms with a gentle strength.

Sammy smiled and nodded.

Merle’s tentacles felt along Sammy’s legs and feet before finally he lifted her off the floor.

“Thank you.” said Merle gleefully.

Sammy smirked. “It’s a pleasure.”

Merle turned with surprising speed to look back at Helga. “I don’t know how you did it but thank you. After all these years, a meal I don’t have to feel guilty about.”

Helga said. “I’m glad you like her. You’re a good man, Merle. You are absolutely worth a million Vligury but you’re right, it is good to not feel guilty for once.”

Merle started heading towards a booth.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” said Helga.

He gave her a curious look.

“Your drink.” said Helga as she grabbed Carla.

Carla stood up and looked to Merle. She winked.

Merle stared for a long moment then asked. “Have I died and gone to heaven?”

Carla approached Merle and said. “I’ll walk behind you and wait for you to take me. You focus on Sammy, I would.”

Sammy chuckled.

Merle extended a tentacle to Carla. “Thank you, ever so much.”

“Just enjoy us.” said Carla as she took the tentacle in her right hand. “That’s all the thanks we need.”

Merle walked off with Carla into an empty cubicle.

Helga let out a deep sigh of relief that the whole pub joined in on.

Eliza strode over to Helga and took her hands. “Is everything, alright?”

“Yes.” said Helga as she looked at the cubicle Merle had entered. “Yes I think everything is going to be alright for quite a while.”

She turned her head to look at Eliza and a long moment passed between the pair of them before she said. “Take the eggs up to my room then go see how Lisa is doing. Remember we need her off the spit before too much is taken.”

Eliza nodded and walked past Helga to fetch the basket of eggs.

Helga turned her attention to me.

I swallowed.

“Take the night off.” She said. “Try to enjoy yourself, there’s protection in the gents.”

Then Helga went behind the bar and handed me some coins with strange looking symbols on them.

“Thank you.” I said.

The confusion must have been obvious on my face because Helga said. “They can tell you how the money works.”

Then Helga remembered something as she ducked behind the bar and a moment later presented me with a pint of blood.

I sighed and took the pint. I gulped it down with the knowledge that it had to be done.

Someone took the seat beside me. She was tall with long brown and a very broad chest. I might have focused on that a little too long.

She giggled. It was this delightful little chirrup.

“The name’s Fiora.” She said, extending a hand.

I shook it. “Steve, and sorry about the whole... Not looking at your face thing. It’s been a long day and I am quite drunk.”

“Too drunk to consent?” she asked curiously.

I stared at her, a sudden rush of blood bringing a renewed bout of sobriety. She was gorgeous but there was something different about her, something I couldn’t quite place...

She must have seen the cogs whirring in my brain because she said. “I’ll solve the riddle going through your head. I am a woman but I was not born with the characteristics one might associate with a woman.”

“You’re trans?” I asked.

She thought for a second then said. “Yes, I am a transgender woman, Steve. The Contravoxai are very good about providing help for those who are transgender or non-binary.”

I nodded. “A very fine woman you are too. I didn’t mean anything by my… Umm, curiosity. I should think I can consent, if that is your wish?”

Fiora laughed then said. “You’re a stranger here aren’t you, Steve?”

“Whatever gave you that impression?” I asked as I gulped at my blood.

“Vligury are raised to worship the Contravoxai.” said Fiora carefully. “We are literally made to believe that it is a great honour that must never be turned down if a Contravoxai wants to eat you.”

I said. “I didn’t see much worship when Merle entered?”

“That is because the flipside of our worship of Contravoxai is the instinctual revulsion and fear of that which can destroy us.” said Fiora bluntly. “I have lost a lot of good friends to Merle over the years.”

I looked to the floor awkward. “Oh my god, I’m so sorry.”

“Oh, it’s okay. They went willingly, as I will.” said Fiora dismissively. “My point is that you reacted with neither worship or fear, you reacted with confusion and curiosity.”

I nodded then looked curiously at Fiora. “So... Why are you talking to me?”

“My best friend thinks you’re really hot and exotic.” said Fiora awkwardly. “Sorry if that comes across as racist.”

I shook my head. “Rather refreshing actually, where is this friend?”

Fiora grinned and got up from her stool. “Follow me.”

I nodded then downed my blood before I got up and followed her.

It was now that I noticed her dress it was blue, backless and strapless and I felt like a terrible voyeur looking at it but I had to admit, it was a good look. Stilleto heels clicked on the floor as she walked.

We approached the table where a short, slender, dark skinned woman in a fluffy jacket and jeans sat reading a book.

Fiora said. “Steve, may I present Roxy, my best friend from back before I transitioned.”

Roxy looked up at me and blushed. “I’m terribly sorry, it must be such an inconvenience.”

I shook my head. “Why would it be an inconvenience to meet two such beautiful ladies?”

She looked at me like I was a puppy. “Aww...”

Fiora said. “Well, sit down.”

I smirked and took a seat opposite Roxy as Fiora took a seat beside me.

Roxy stared at me and grinned. She sighed.

I chuckled. “So what do you girls do around here? What’s it like being a Vligury?”

“We read, we play computer games, we have sex.” said Roxy casually.

I smirked. “Yes, we do those things where I come from.” Then I caught myself, remembering the sack of Tipton. “Came from.”

Roxy took my hands and squeezed them compassionately. “Oh I am sorry, Steve, if there was anything I could do...?”

I sighed. “Something is being done. I live because someone decided I was worth saving. Billions of people on planet Earth, Physicists, Doctors, Teachers, Firefighters, Diplomats... and she saved me.”

Roxy looked me in the eyes and I could see she was on the verge of tears for me, for my world and people.

Fiora patted me on the back.

I forced a laugh. “Look at me, bringing the mood down? I’m alive. I’m alive and with two very beautiful women.”

“We should tell him.” said Fiora carefully.

“We can’t.” said Roxy firmly. “He’s lost so much already.”

Fiora said. “It’s not fair to lie to someone about something like this. I know because I was there, remember?”

Roxy was silent for a moment then she said. “You are with Sammy and Carla aren’t you?”

I nodded. “They saved my life.”

“Well, I assume Helga told you that Merle’s a regular right?” said Roxy as her eyes studied my face.

I nodded. “Helga gives him a couple of Vligury ever so often...”

I swallowed and looked from Roxy to Fiora then I put my head in my hands.

“Helga’s been giving us free drinks and food for a few months now.” said Fiora awkwardly.

“And we’re nearly twenty five.” added Roxy with a frown.

I stared at Roxy, flabbergasted. “So leave? Go to a different pub? Run? Hide? Do something...”

“It’s not the Vligury way.” said Fiora bluntly.

Roxy shrugged. “We’ve known Helga and Merle since we were 16. They’re good people. We’re not about to abandon them.”

“But you’ll die.” I said pointedly. “I’ve been eaten alive, it’s not nice.”

Roxy frowned and looked sadly at me.

Fiora said gently. “We’ve been raised for this, we are destined for this. If not Merle it’ll be somebody else.”

“And Merle’s nice.” said Roxy pointedly. “He helps out with the maintenance of the pub and frequently helps out people who are endangered at night. Thanks to him the streets are safe to walk.”

“Until your number comes up.” I said bluntly. “Are you really going to go willingly?”

Roxy shrugged.

“Helga won’t make us, if that’s what you’re wondering?” said Fiora sweetly. “We could say no and Helga would ask somebody else.”

“But we won’t say no.” said Roxy firmly then she smiled. “I’m actually kind of looking forward to it.”

I stared at her.

Fiora nodded in agreement. “To feel those strong tentacles embrace me. Gonna be quite the experience.”

I shook my head in disbelief.

Roxy sighed. “Anyway this is why we want you, because we don’t have long.”

I swallowed. This was all too much to take in.

Roxy cleared the hair from my face and asked. “You do like us, don’t you?”

“Yes.” I said seriously.

She leaned in and kissed me on the lips. “Well I want you to join me and Fiora.”

Fiora seemed surprise. “You want me as well?”

Roxy chuckled. “I always have.”

Fiora leaned in. “Just tell me if you don’t want me involved and I won’t mind.”

I put my right arm around Fiora and whispered in her ear. “You are a very beautiful woman and I am not going to say no to you.”

She giggled and put her left arm around me, she kissed my ear then whispered. “So do you want Roxy involved? Because I kind of do.”

I grinned and kissed Roxy on the lips. “Never had a threesome before. Still interested?”

Roxy grinned and kissed first me then Fiora.

I said. “I’ve got a room on the third floor but I need to go get protection. Guest room number 7, okay?”

I got up from my seat and left Roxy and Fiora snogging each other.

When I returned from the gents I found them making out outside my room. I unlocked the door and they led me to the bed.

*

I woke early the next morning and left Fiora and Roxy embracing each other in their sleep as I got a shower.

When I got out of the shower I put the kettle on and got dressed. As I made myself a mug of tea Fiora stirred. I smirked and wafted the steam over to them.

Fiora opened her eyes and smiled at me. “Milk, two sugars, if you please?”

I nodded and made her a mug.

Fiora sat up in bed and Roxy stirred.

Fiora pulled her close and said. “You’re beautiful, you know that?”

Roxy laughed and booped Fiora on the nose then asked. “Any chance of a Frappachino?”

I said glibly. “The options are tea, coffee, decaff coffee water, white or brown sugar or artificial sweetener, milk or no milk.”

Roxy stared at me then said. “Coffee, black. Now.”

Fiora gave Roxy a curious look. “But you hate black coffee?”

Roxy said. “If I’m going to drink something that tastes like arse then I’m going hardcore.”

I smirked and presented Fiora and Roxy their beverages then said. “Listen, I better go but you two stay as long as you like. You make a cute couple.”

Fiora laughed.

Roxy gave Fiora a curious look.

I finished my tea and left them in my bed. It wasn’t like I had anything they could steal.

Helga was walking down the hall with Lucy at the end of a leash.

I stared at them and frowned.

Helga said. “She misses her owner so I have decided to take over the role.”

Lucy had a stupid grin on her face.

I gave her a concerned look then followed her.

Helga knocked on the door of room number 6 and Lisa answered the door, wearing a crop top and a short skirt.

Lisa looked really happy.

Helga smiled at Lisa. “I hear you had a good night, made a lot of money for me.”

Lisa nodded. “I love the spit. So peaceful, so warm and so much love.”

Helga smirked. “Apparently by the time Eliza arrived your skull had been split open and half your brain was taken.”

Lisa grinned. “Never had my brain eaten before, that’s a first.”

Helga asked hopefully. “Feel like going again tonight?”

Lisa threw her arms around Helga in excitement and gratitude. “Yes, absolutely.”

Then she said. “Maybe we can add a little spice this time? Not full Jalfrezi but maybe a Tikka Masala?”

Helga smirked. “I’ll have a talk with the chef.”

Lisa approached me and said. “Promise you’ll come see me tonight?”

I nodded.

Then Sammy exited the room dressed in a low cut shirt and lounge trousers. “You left me with Lisa last night, you know that?”

Helga frowned. “Merle didn’t exactly leave us with much to identify you by.”

Sammy smirked. “I’m not complaining, I got to enjoy Lisa after her happy little turn on the spit.”

Lisa blushed.

“Actually I’m thinking of seeing Merle again tonight.” said Sammy wistfully. “That man may have not been handed the best set of cards by fate but he knows his way around a woman.”

Sammy shut her eyes and a look of ecstasy came across her face.

I smiled at her look of happiness then she opened her eyes and caught me looking, I could feel my ears burn as my face went red.

Sammy took my hand and asked. “What’ll you be doing?”

“Cleaning glasses.” said Helga.

“Cleaning glasses” I said.

Sammy smirked.

Helga knocked on room number 5.

Carla answered the door.

Lisa glared at her. “You didn’t eat me last night.”

Carla glared at Helga. “I was busy, Merle is not a quick eater.”

Sammy said. “I found him to be quite spry.”

Carla scowled. “But he talks so much. He always wants to make sure you’re calm and enjoying it. Like, Bucko I’m missing an arm and a leg and you’ve eaten my liver and kidneys, maybe we can skip the pleasantries and skip to me becoming offal, yeah?”

Helga snorted.

Sammy said. “It’s sweet and heck that’s why you eat people right? The only meal you can have a conversation with.”

Lisa said sourly. “Well make sure you join me tonight, yeah?”

Carla asked curiously. “You’re going on the spit again?”

Lisa nodded. “Apparently I’m really popular.”

Carla looked to Helga.

Helga looked completely innocent, so naturally Carla decided to stay behind and speak with her when everyone had gone.

Amy exited the room dressed in a suit. “Good nights, everyone?”

*

I was cleaning glasses in the kitchen at about midday when Helga came to see me.

“I’ve been hearing rumours” She said.

“Right...” I said.

Helga leaned back against the wall beside me and folded her arms. “You and two girls.”

“And that is your business, why?” I asked.

“Roxy and Fiora.” said Helga bluntly. “I’ve been watching them for a long time, been taking good care of them too. They’re lovely girls and they’re my girls and they’re destined for the pot.”

I gritted my teeth. “Right...”

“They didn’t tell you?” asked Helga uncertainly. “That’s not like them.”

I tried to leave things be. “Well, that’s your business, I don’t see what that’s got to do with me?”

Helga snorted. “You tried to talk Sammy out of going with Merle yesterday and Sammy can heal...”

I tried again. “Look, what do you want me to say?”

“The truth.” said Helga seriously. “You just watched your whole planet fall to the Contravoxai and you think I’m stupid enough to see nothing dangerous in you having a threesome with two girls who, if not for Sammy and Carla turning up yesterday, would be dead?”

Now I stopped cleaning glasses. I turned to Helga, fire in my eyes. “How many have you killed? How many have died because you feel pity for that thing?”

Helga was calm. “I lost count a long time ago but two every three months over lets say 25 years, I dunno maybe more, some days there’d be a really important Contravoxai dignitary or something and I’d have to ask for someone else to...”

I stared at her. “200 people. Over 200 people have died because of your pity?”

Helga nodded. “Sounds about right but they all had good lives and they all had good deaths and they all went willingly.”

“How does your society even function?” I asked, beyond outraged and disgusted.

“We have a lot of kids on a regular basis, we have very good medical technology and we all honestly believe that dying for the Contravoxai is a profound honour.” said Helga.

I shook my head. “And I thought my world had problems. This is monstrous. I should kill you. I should kill you right now. I mean you’ve openly stated that you’ll kill again, I could save them.”

Helga shook her head. “You think this is just me? That I’m some lone mass murderer? You’ve seen the dining halls, you were eaten at one. I am kind. I am sparing. I am compassionate. I only ask for two a month. There are places that take 200 a day. You kill me and Roxy and Fiora will still die. They are destined for the pot. What are you going to do, lead a revolution? Well good luck, because we don’t want one.”

I closed my eyes and caught my reflection in the washing up water then I stared at Helga “No, I don’t need to. I can save them and save all the others who would die after them.”

“No. You can’t.” said Helga gently.

“Then why am I still alive?” I asked bluntly.

Helga stared at me. “No... You haven’t, have you? It’s bad enough having one wereshark, let alone three...”

I shook my head then shrugged. “Sammy’s a wereshark, Carla’s a wereshark, Amy’s a wereshark, heck even Lisa and Lucy are weresharks.”

Helga shook her head. “You’re chasing dreams.”

“If I can be cured then Roxy and Fiora can be saved.” I said.

“And you would condemn them to an immortality of being eaten alive?” asked Helga seriously. “I mean I would, but as we’ve established I’m a mass murderer. Could you live with yourself?”

“Well Sammy and the others seem pretty fine with it.” I said pointtedly. “And besides the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.”

Helga said firmly. “They’re for the pot, Steve, let it go and forget about them.”

I made to leave the kitchen and then I paused and leaned in close to Helga. “I am going to save Roxy and Fiora and if something happens to them I will hold you responsible and you really don’t want that because never mind being a wereshark I am a man who has lost so very much and just been told that the small joy I have just found is something you plan to take away from me as well. Roxy and Fiora are under my protection, you understand?”

Helga nodded. “Well with Sammy taking a shine to Merle I won’t be needing Roxy and Fiora for a while anyway.”

I left to find Roxy and Fiora.

*

I arrived on the third floor and saw an open fire with a brick facade hiding some kind of advanced smoke extractor and there, rotating slowly on a metal shaft over the fire, was Lisa.

I approached her and saw that - though the charring from the fire and spice marinade made it hard to tell from a distance - she was completely naked. Her head had been shaved. The shaft entered her mouth, continued down her throat and roughly through her mid section until it exited via her arsehole and pierced the palms of her hands before continuing on a while and finally piercing the soles of her feet. Her arms and legs were also bound tightly with string.

“Quite the sight, isn’t she?” said a wise upper class sounding woman beside me. “Amazing to think she’s still alive.”

I nodded and added. “Amazing to think that she actually enjoys this.”

The woman beside me smirked. “Oh does she? Then I won’t feel bad about taking a slice or two.”

Then, as I watched, two tentacles whipped out to halt the turning of Lisa on the spit, two bought over a plate and held it steady beside Lisa’s left arse cheek and a fifth and sixth carved Lisa’s roasted flesh from her arse and placed it on a plate.

I stared then turned to look at this upperclass woman. She was a Contravoxai wearing what I can only describe as some alien form of stylish scarf, waistcoat, skirt and high heals. It was an absurd sight.

“Oh, where are my manners? You want a plate too?” said the sharp dressed Contravoxai and she bought up a different plate with two more tentacles then she carved off some more of Lisa’s flesh and presented the plate to me.

She looked at me expectantly and presented me with the plate of flesh.

I took it and said. “Umm... thank you.”

“Charlotte Kensington.” said the sharp dressed Contravoxai and she stretched out a tentacle.

I shook it. “Steve Banks.”

She regarded me for a moment then said. “You’re English, aren’t you? Properly English?”

“Well yes...” I said and then I twigged. “I am not hearing a translation am I, you’re genuinely speaking English”

She bowed her head to show off a toothy grin. “My ship got shot down by a Grafilod cruiser when I was but a sporeling and I was raised by one Edmund Kensington. He taught me manners and morality. You need not fear me ,Steve, I am not like the brutes that razed your world.”

I regarded her for a moment then said. “You know I’m an escapee?”

She nodded, an absurdly human gesture. “If you ever need help, these are my coordinates.”

She handed me a note of paper with a long string of numbers on it.

I put it in my pocket. “Thank you.”

“You have friends here, Steve. Not every Contravoxai believes a Vligury’s life should be so easily discarded. Now, if you’ll excuse me, there’s a drunk over there about to try his luck with two Vligury girls...” said Charlotte before walking away.

I stared after her then remembered where I was standing and approached Lisa’s head.

I stopped the spit spinning with my left hand and booped her nose with my right. She opened her eyes and the corners of her mouth turned upwards. I held my plate where she could see and watched her recognise and try to squee in excitement.

“Lisa...” I said carefully. “You are an utterly weird individual but I can see why Carla likes you.”

Lisa blushed as I stroked her bald head then I left her to rotate on the spit.

I scanned the crowd and saw Fiora sitting with Roxy and some other guy. I approached.

They were wearing what they had been wearing yesterday and clearly hadn’t been home. The man looked tall, skinny and nervous. He seemed to be very young and wore a suit jacket over trackies and a tshirt with some Contravoxai slogan on it that my wereshark understanding told me meant: ‘My sausage brings all the Contravoxai to the pub.’

“You’re eating Lisa?” asked Roxy curiously. “Isn’t that against your whole ‘Thou shalt not eat people.’ thing?”

I said. “Hey, you can have it if you want, this nice Contravoxai carved it for me.”

“Ooh cheers...” said Roxy enthusiastically.

I handed over the plate and asked. “So who’s this guy?”

Fiora snorted. “We’ve known him for years.”

I shrugged.

He stretched out a hand. “Glenn. Glenn Johnson. I’m – er - unemployed.”

I shook his hand. “Steve Banks. Wereshark on the run from the Contravoxai.”

He stared me. “Really?”

“Yuh.” I said. “What’s it to you?”

“He wants to go on the spit.” said Fiora with a smirk.

“But chicken little doesn’t want to die.” said Roxy with a chuckle.

He frowned and shrugged. “I know its cowardly of me, I mean I really wanna do it, to just lie back and let others take from me but I just - I want to live.”

I grinned. “I can help you.”

“What?” asked Fiora, stunned.

Roxy glared at me. “Give it up man, we’re gonna get eaten by Merle and Glenn’s gonna get on that spit. That’s how it’s gonna go.”

“How?” asked Glenn, ignoring them.

“I think you know how.” I said quietly. “I’m a wereshark and I am going to get cured of the whole angry rage thing and when I do, well, I’ll be like Sammy and Carla and, yes, even Lisa. This is actually why I came to find you.”

Fiora sighed. “Roxy’s right, Steve. You don’t need to save us. We’re going to be eaten by Merle and we’re okay with that. He’s a nice guy.”

“Except I learned from Helga that, just by coming here, I’ve saved you two.” I said pointedly.

Roxy stared at me.

Fiora asked. “What?”

“If I hadn’t shown up here, if Sammy and Carla hadn’t come with me, you would have been fed to him last night.” I said.

Fiora shuddered.

Roxy said very quietly. “Shit.”

Glenn said. “Yeah, giving your life nobly to be a nice meal for a Contravoxai is all very well when it’s some abstract future destination. Almost nice in a way when you’ve just graduated university and have no idea what you’re going to do with your life. I don’t need to worry about my student debt or children or a pension because some nice Contravoxai is going to sweep me off my feet and make sure none of

those worries ever happen. And then the day arrives and you think ‘You know what? I actually quite like life.’”

Roxy frowned “But Merle’s so nice and I’ve known for so long, I’ve dreamed about it... Those strong tentacles taking me...” She shook her head. “Glenn’s right I do want to live but Merle’s been my destination for so long, I can’t imagine anything else.”

“I don’t think that’s the problem.” said Fiora curiously. “You aren’t saving us from Merle are you, you’re saving us from death?”

I closed my eyes, swallowed, then nodded.

Roxy asked. “But what does that even mean?”

“It means you’re going to remain under Helga’s charge, and probably under Eliza’s charge and whoever inherits the business after that too. It means you are going to get eaten alive every day until the end of time or the Contravoxai change their ways.” I said seriously. “It means you’re going to be cattle.”

Fiora shrugged. “We already are.”

Roxy smiled. “I’m going to get eaten alive forever?”

“It’s the best I can do.” I said with a shrug.

Glenn grinned. “I could take the spit everyday.”

“Thank you” I said then I got up from the table and said. “I better go take my sanity potion.” then I looked at Fiora and Roxy and chucked them the key to my room. “Stay with me until I get the cure won’t you? I don’t trust Helga not to feed you to someone while I’m sleeping.”

“Thank you” said Fiora.

Roxy nodded and went to hug Fiora.

Glenn said. “You’re a good guy, you know. I’ll do my best to hold off Helga, if she comes for them.”

I nodded and left.

As I approached the stairs I saw Carla eating some meat from a plate as she watched Lisa turn.

Helga approached Carla from behind and whispered something in her ear then Carla walked off with Helga.

I headed downstairs quickly.

As I arrived at the bar Eliza caught my eye then wordlessly slit Lucy’s throat so she could pour out a pint of her blood for me.

Eliza placed the pint on the table then wrapped a bandage round Lucy's throat.

Lucy barely reacted.

"Helga's been taming her all day." said Eliza by way of explanation. "Says it's kinder for the poor girl but I think Helga likes it, having a submissive who'll obey her every whim."

I drank the blood and studied Eliza's face. I wondered what kind of woman would you have to be to send 200 girls and boys to their deaths and what might that kind of woman do with a subordinate like Eliza?

I shook my head and said. "You know I just saw her heading off with Carla."

Eliza nodded sadly. "I don't blame her."

I took my pint and looked for somewhere to sit and drink it. As I walked I overheard someone say: "You don't turn 25 for at least another 3 months, you're fine."

I turned to the sound, a short fat ginger man was trying placate a tall blonde woman. I decided to sit at their table.

"You don't need to worry." I said "I know who's next for the chop and it's not you."

"And who are you?" asked the man.

"Steve Banks." I said. "You?"

"Gerald." said the man.

"Annabelle." said the woman.

"How do you know?" asked Gerald.

"Because I just had a threesome with the two lovely ladies who are next for the chop." I said. Okay so I may have been bragging ever so slightly. "Fiora and Roxy."

Annabelle said. "But what if they're just paranoid like Gerald thinks I am, it could still be me?"

I shook my head and said. "They aren't paranoid because the great Lady of the Manor, Mistress Helga Hufflepuff warned me not to mess with her soon to be slaughtered lambs."

"What's a Hufflepuff?" asked Gerald.

"No idea." I said. "The point is you are safe, trust me."

Annabelle and Gerald both looked at me for a long moment then Annabelle hugged me. "Oh, thank you. Thank you ever so much."

I patted her back and sipped my drink.

Then Gerald announced. “Here he is again, the great garbage can for our youth.”

I turned to look.

Merle entered carrying in his arms the bloodied remnants of Sammy’s head, spinal column and hearts. His tentacles stretched out and placed them on the bar and he muttered. “Thank you” Then he left.

I extricated myself from Annabelle and approached the bar and wanted to vomit. It was a horrible sight.

“Thorough work.” said Eliza, coldly dispassionate in the face of such horror. She must be used to the barbarity of the Contravoxai by now. “He’s left just enough of her in tact that she will heal completely without risking creating a clone.”

I stared at Sammy’s remains and thought of the woman whose beauty had so stolen my heart last night. I downed the pint of blood.

Eliza stared at me, aghast. “How can you drink blood having seen this?”

I slammed the empty glass on the table and burped. “Because I need to have a word with Mister Merle.”

“Be careful” said Eliza.

I laughed bitterly.

*

The thing about Contravoxai is they’ve got eyes on the back of their head and tentacles on the back of their body. It is impossible to jump one from behind. Merle should have been easier to take on though what with his missing eyes and lame tentacles. Except now that I looked at him, his eyes seemed to have grown back and...

His lame tentacles shot up and about my neck as Merle came to a stop. He hissed “You so much as squeal and I’ll start applying pressure. What is your deal, kid?”

“You ate my friend.” I said.

“She consented and she lives.” said Merle.

“And the others?” I said.

Merle was silent for a long time then he asked. “What do you hope to achieve?”

“I want to stop the deaths.” I said. “Helga won’t stop feeding people to you but you might stop killing them.”

His tentacles released me.

“You seem like a smart kid.” He said. “But before I enlighten you, I want you to show me you’re as smart as I think you are so tell me, why is it that I am not as lame as I was yesterday?”

“Sammy’s dna.” I said. “The Sylph blood is what keeps my wereshark madness at bay. You ate Carla and Sammy last night? That’s a whole lot of Sylph dna in your system, supercharging it with left over power.”

“Good...” said Merle. “You really are smart, hopefully smart enough to avoid trying to kill me. Now come, Helga thinks I’m homeless but that’s not exactly true...”

I nodded. “Lead on, Macduff.”

Merle snapped bitterly. “Lay on. It’s ‘Lay on, Macduff.’ What do they teach you in school these days?”

Then Merle picked a direction and started walking on his eight great spider like legs.

I followed.

A short slender Contravoxai approached and curtsied towards us. “How was the pub, honey?”

“Oh it was quite agreeable and I’ve bought a friend to visit, if that’s alright?” said Merle warmly.

The Contravoxai seemed to nod and said. “Enjoy your stay.”

“Right...” I said.

“Read any Harry Potter?” asked Merle.

“Uhh... Yes...” I said, confused.

“Pretend she’s platform nine and three quarters.” said Merle before charging heading into the small Contravoxai and phazing out of existence.

I shrugged and cried. “Slytherin rules!” I charged at the Contravoxai.

*

I ran though the automatic double doors of a large atrium. There were plants in trees and pots everywhere and mounted weapons, suits of armour and various treasures. Ornate wooden doors led off left, right and onwards.

Merle stood beside me and looked rather bored.

“Where the fuck are we?” I asked.

Merle seemed to consider for a moment then said. “Inside a very old friend...”

“The Contravoxai outside?” I asked.

“My first love.” said Merle. “She was dying of what you would know as cancer and I found a way to extend her life, to give her near immortality.”

“How?” I asked.

Merle started walking.

I followed.

“The world as you know it, as you have always known it, is an artificial construction of a nearly sentient force. Some call it the quantum flux, the net of life or the dream weave but the people currently running the multiverse call it logic.” said Merle. “I found a way to harness the natural logic found in living creatures and focus it into glass spheres. The logic would suffuse the glass turning it green and it could then be expelled and directed at a target by shining a lazer through the glass.”

“So you filled your love with logic?” I asked. “How does that make her immortal?”

“It doesn’t.” said Merle bluntly. “But she always was a smart girl and with the logic of several small villages inside her she transcended biology and matter to become a sapient being composed entirely of logic. I had helped her become a god and she became this for me, she reached into my mind and made her interior my dream home.”

He snorted in remembered amazement. “You know she can travel in time? She can voyage the entire multiverse and she lets me travel with her, pilot her.”

“Pilot her?” I asked.

The slender Contravoxai appeared beside me. “Yes, I have no desire to be a god, no desire to wonder alone, I go where my love wants to and I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

I stared at her, quite taken a back.

“Oh, sorry” said the Contravoxai and her image flickered to be replaced with the image of Sammy in a short shirt and skirt. “Would this be more to your tastes?”

I swallowed. “Okay, so this is some kind of holographic projection?”

“Real enough.” said the image as her hands reached out for me and started to delve down my pants.

“Hey! Hey!” I said as I backed way and tried to stop her.

Merle said tersely. “Verity, please don’t play with him.”

The image stopped and rather sulkily withdrew her hands. “You get to eat girls, why can’t I enjoy one boy?”

Merle groaned.

I said. “Tell me, how many girls has he eaten?”

“At least three million” said the image.

I turned to Merle, furious. “Explain.”

Merle shrugged. “I’m a Contravoxai and nearly 2000 years old.”

I said firmly. “It needs to end.”

“I know.” said Merle quietly. “And it already has. If you’ll just be patient, I’ll show you.”

I sighed and waved him on.

Merle led me through a labyrinth of corridors, including a patch of open sky where it was snowing, to a room deep in the bowels of the place.

He paused outside a set of double doors and said. “What I have to show you now may be disturbing but I assure yu no one is in any pain.”

Then he opened the doors and we walked through.

The first thing I noticed was the sound of artificial lungs and a series of regular bleeps.

Merle stood in the centre of the room and spread his arms wide. “Take a look around, let me know if you have any questions.”

So I looked.

There were the remains of eight different people hooked up to machines. They were in various states of conditions. Some almost had an intact head and torso but others were little more than a heart and skull, kept alive by complex machinery.

“Eight people.” I said. “Or the remains of them. Helga said she sent you two every three months...?”

Merle nodded. “The moment Sammy turned up I knew it wasn’t a fluke. People could be eaten and recover.”

“Or they could ‘not’ be eaten?” I said pointedly.

Merle sighed. “This is a world full of predators, boy, do you think that if I let one go they will skip off merrily to their happy ending? No. It is kinder to take and enjoy the lambs that throw themselves upon your mercy. These all belong to me now and when you bring me cure I shall feast like a king and they will be glad of it.”

“So what? You eat a person then put them here and you think that means you own them?” I asked angrily.

“They gave themselves to me.” said Merle casually. “And I keep them safely sedated in artificial comas so they may sleep until you bring me the cure.”

“And why shouldn’t I kill you?” I asked bluntly. “You’ve killed so many.”

“Because I am worth more alive as an ally.” said Merle meaningfully. “Your people are not yet lost, they can still be saved. If you can kill the emperor, our great Leader, then I can start a revolution and free your people.”

I stared at him.

“Yes.” said Merle, a note of optimism in his voice. “I see you recognise the magnitude of what I am saying. I will help you get home in whatever way I can but we must keep this place as our little secret, I do not want Verity involved in this, you understand? She is too precious to me.”

I nodded. “But if you ever take another...?”

“Then my life will be forfeit.” said Merle calmly.

*

I made it back to the pub and Sammy was waiting for me at the bar, wearing a fitted tshirt and short skirt. She was chatting idly to Eliza and petting Lucy like she was a puppy.

Eliza spotted me and grabbed a glass. Within a minute a fresh bandage had been applied round Lucy’s neck and I had a fresh pint of blood to drink.

Sammy cooed over Lucy and said. “Eliza tells me you had a little word with Merle?”

“Yes...” I said carefully. “I did.”

“Feeling jealous?” she asked without looking at me.

“Well, I don’t want to eat you.” I said bluntly. “At least not like that.”

Eliza smirked.

Sammy looked me in the eyes. “Then why did you see him?”

“Because you saved my life and he eats you and I don’t like that.” I said bluntly.

Sammy sighed. “But I like being eaten. I like the sense of loss and powerlessness, of being insignificant and subservient.”

I sighed and approached her – In that moment all I wanted to do was take her in my arms and show her how she could feel that way with a partner who respected her as a person but I stopped myself. - I sipped my drink, stroked Lucy and said. “He’s eaten others, if I hadn’t spoken to him he would have eaten more.”

“Would have?” asked Eliza, arching an eyebrow.

“He’s going to help us.” I said.

“He is?” asked Sammy curiously. “How did you manage that?”

“I didn’t.” I said. “You did. His eating you transferred a small a mount of regenerative potential like drinking from Lucy transfers the necessary subservience to stay sane.”

Sammy smirked. “Eating me made him better? That’s awesome.”

A tentacle whipped past us and tentatively tapped on the table for attention.

Eliza looked up. “Yes?”

“Umm, I think you might want to take your girl off the spit, her rib cage is showing and people have started cracking open her bones for the marrow.” said a familiar voice.

“Yikes!” said Eliza and she ran off.

Sammy stared in awe.

I coughed.

The stylish Contravoxai regarded me for a moment then hugged me with her tentacles with such force and excitement that I was lifted up into the air. “Steven, how nice to see you again?”

Sammy looked to me. “You know this Contravoxai?”

I nodded and said. “Sammy, may I introduce Miss Charlotte Kensington.”

Charlotte stepped back and studied Sammy, her tentacles hovering around Sammy.

Sammy grinned. “You’re English aren’t you?”

“Yes and I never eat a girl who can’t recover.” said Charlotte cheerfully. “May I make a closer examination?”

Sammy smirked and her cheeks flushed with colour. She nodded.

Charlotte’s tentacles darted around Sammy and under her clothes. Within a moment Sammy was lifted off the ground as tentacles checked the weight, mass and strength of very bone and muscle in her body.

“How do you feel about things being inside you?” asked Charlotte casually.

I stared at Charlotte. “What kind of a question is that?”

Charlotte shrugged. “I don’t get to do this very often, I want to be thorough.”

Sammy was laughing her head off. Finally she calmed down enough to say. “Yes. Yes, Charlotte I am fine with things inside me.”

Charlotte chuckled then said. “Well, open wide for me girl, I’ll know when I’ve overstepped my bounds.”

Sammy opened her mouth and said “Ahhh...” as if at a dentist.

A tentacle darted inside her mouth and started making a thorough examination.

Then, rather abruptly, Charlotte laid Sammy back, standing, on the floor.

“Sorry.” said Charlotte awkwardly.

“Ask me out on a date first before going there, yeah?” said Sammy, her face flushed completely red.

“Understood.” said Charlotte quietly.

“You can still eat me though.” said Sammy with a smirk.

Charlotte was obviously taken aback. “What? Why?”

Sammy chuckled. “You asked, I just didn’t quite understand what you meant and you did save Lisa so... Bite me.”

Charlotte was silent for a long moment.

I sighed and said. “Charlotte, you’re a good egg, you saved two people earlier today. I like you. I know that Sammy isn’t mine to give away but she wants to be eaten by you and this is me saying that if Sammy is going to be eaten by a Contravoxai I would rather it was you.”

Sammy turned to look at me. “You’re serious? You’re fine with me going with her?”

“I like her.” I said with a shrug. “She only eats those who like it and can recover. Enjoy each other.”

Sammy kissed me on the lips and threw her arms around me then said. “Pick a cubicle, Charlotte, you’re getting a free lunch.”

Charlotte shook her head. “What? I don’t understand.”

“Pick me up, carry me into a cubicle, strip me naked and tear the flesh from my bones until only my hearts and brain are left.” said Sammy slowly.

“Oh...” said Charlotte sheepishly. “Thank you.”

Then she enveloped Sammy in her tentacles and carried her off.

Eliza arrived and said. “Lisa’s been taken to her room, she’ll live. Where’s Sammy?”

“Making a Contravoxai very happy.” I said.

Eliza smirked. “You too, huh?”

“What?” I asked, not understanding.

Eliza placed two tumblers on the table and poured out measures of Pass-Through Brandy “I haven’t seen Helga all day and neither have I seen Carla.” She raised her tumbler in a toast. “To absent crushes.”

I chuckled and raised my tumbler. “To absent crushes.”

*

The next morning I left my room, clean shaven and showered, in a new suit. Fiora and Roxy had taken up my offer and were going to spend the next week slowly moving essentials from their homes into the room. Glenn was in no immediate danger and so he opted not to join the three of us but he was going to move some of his possessions there on the off-chance that I did get the cure and he could live full time at the pub.

As I passed her room Lisa exited in a short pink skirt and crop top. It was a delightful change to see her looking so fresh faced and happy with long blonde hair again. She hugged me and I was glad of it. It felt good to check that she was really okay.

“You came to see me yesterday, didn’t you?” asked Lisa enthusiastically.

I nodded. “Yes. It wasn’t the most usual sight I’ve ever seen but if it makes you happy...”

She grinned and said cheekily. “You ate me, how did I taste?”

“Umm... Good.” I said uncertainly. “Very umm... Meaty.”

She smirked.

Sammy exited her room in jeans and a blouse and stroked Lisa’s hair idly as she talked to me. “So, I had a very good time with Charlotte last night.”

“Did you indeed?” I said as I tried to sound nonplussed.

“She is a very kind and sensitive devourer.” said Sammy. “I can see why you like her.”

Then Sammy looked to Lisa and booped her nose with her forefinger. “You should visit her.”

“Oh...” said Lisa with considerable curiosity.

Sammy looked Lisa in the eyes and stroked her cheek. “You would just melt in her mouth. It’ll be fantastic.”

Lisa smiled. “Alright but I want you on the spit.”

“Deal.” said Sammy as she tickled her chin. “I wish I could be there to witness your unravelling.”

“I’ll send you the security camera footage.” said Eliza, behind us.

“Oh, thanks.” said Sammy with a smile.

Eliza took my hand and whispered. “We need to talk.”

I smiled and let her take the lead.

We were soon at the bar downstairs and Eliza was giving me a pint of blood from Lucy.

“Look this may sound strange but do you have pets in your world?” asked Eliza.

“Yes.” I said curiously. “Goldfish, Hamsters, Guinea Pigs, Cats, Dogs, Budgerigar... Some people keep Lizards and Spiders.”

“Right... Good” said Eliza as she nodded thoughtfully, “So this won’t be an entirely alien concept to you.”

“Okay...” I said uncertaintly. “Explain away.”

“Well you know how the girls are Sylphs and that means they’re submissive enough to not give into the madness of the wereshark and want to be eaten?” asked Eliza.

“Well yeah, it’s why drinking Lucy’s blood keeps me sane.” I said.

“Exactly.” said Eliza with a nod. “It also means she likes to be kept as a pet. Well, they all do but Lucy especially and well... Look at her.”

Lucy wore a shirt and skirt but she was hunched down on all 4s eating pet kibble from a bowl. Eliza stroked her back and scratched her under the chin. Lucy purred.

“Yeah, that’s not exactly typical of a person.” I said.

“But it is of a Sylph.” said Eliza then she looked me in the eyes and said. “I’m not letting her go with you and I don’t think Lucy would want to. After such a long time being eaten alive she’s finally getting the love and support she needs.”

I shrugged. “Well I need her blood to stay alive...”

Eliza nodded. “I know but Lucy is special. She can asexually reproduce fast growing clones that inherit her memories by laying eggs.”

I stared at Eliza. “Bullshit!”

Eliza reached behind the bar and held, squirming in her hands, a tiny, naked, and perfectly proportioned, blonde haired woman.

“The Fuck?” I asked, incredulous.

Eliza tickled the tiny woman. “We call them hatchlings and they aren’t sapient like people, not at first. This one has about as much intellect as a rodent but as she gets older she’ll scale up through Cat and Dog until finally when she’s nearly fullsize she’s gain human intellect and remember the memories of her mother. Take her.”

“What?” I asked.

“Hold out your hands and take her” said Eliza slowly.

I was kind of flabbergasted but I held out my hands and accepted the tiny squirming woman.

Eliza returned a moment later with a plastic cage and said. “She’ll remember everything that you did when she was like this so if you look after your tiny hatchling pet, the full grown wereshark Sylph with Lucy’s memories will regard you as her true owner and so, love and obey you.”

“I really don’t like this.” I said with a grimace. “This is a person and we’re talking about giving her away so she’ll be my pet and I can drink her blood.”

Eliza shrugged. “Mate, my crush is a mass murderer and your crush gets a kick out of being eaten alive. Just go with the flow, you’re in a different world now.”

I sighed and held the hatchling in my hands so I could look her in the eyes. She tried to bite my finger but her tiny teeth did no damage and she gummed me instead. I dropped her into her cage and muttered. “Brave new world.”

“Oh and don’t forget to change the sawdust in her cage daily.” said Eliza casually. “I’ll have the supplies taken up there.”

I looked at her. “Umm...”

Eliza smirked. “Don’t worry Helga is rather too distracted by Carla to worry about you. I like you and I quite agree that those girls should be protected and made immortal like Sammy. Wish I could have threesomes every night though...”

I snorted.

“Oh, so you’re a true gentleman, are you?” said Eliza, pointedly.

I frowned and could feel my ears burning so I said. “Talk to Lisa, from what I gather, she can be rather free with her affections the morning after a spitroast.”

Eliza grinned. “You know me and you could...?”

I swallowed. “I do not want to mess with Helga’s territory, sorry.”

Eliza sighed. “Probably a sound bit of reasoning that. Now away with you and give that hatchling lots of love and cuddles.”

I nodded and left with the hatchling in the cage and the pint of blood.

*

Weeks turned to months and I and Eliza became close friends as we pined for the women we so yearned to be with. Sammy and I became good friends as well but there was always a bit of weirdness between us as she kept disappearing off to be eaten by one Contravoxai or another and I never quite found the courage to tell her how I felt.

Fiora and Roxy became very close until I was politely asked if I could sleep elsewhere. I accepted because by this point my little hatchling had become rather large and boisterous so I needed the extra space anyway. Lisa so often spent the night alone and as a bowl of slowly healing soup that she didn't mind me staying with her. She never showed it but I think Lisa missed Carla so she liked the companionship.

I actually became quite good friends with Charlotte, the English Contravoxai woman, and it was not uncommon for us to spend the night together as she idly devoured Lisa, Sammy or Amy and I devoured a cultured beef burger and chips.

Carla was only seen very rarely on the end of Helga's leash before being heavily intoxicated with Pass-Through Brandy and handed over to Merle and when Carla healed Helga would always intercept her before she saw Lisa.

Merle remained distant but he would occasionally pass me a book about some famous revolution or other so as to whet my appetite and warn me of the shitstorm we were about to bring down. He would still eat Sammy, Lisa, Amy or Carla when offered them but whenever he did so he would stare at me and carefully gesticulate to indicate he was doing so then hold my gaze until I gave him permission with a nod of the head. I tried shaking my head once and sure enough he said no to eating Sammy and Lisa, only for Charlotte to cough politely and eat them instead. He was very respectful about my hatchling though and in our moments of small talk he would ask after her and seemed genuinely interest in the progress of her development.

Amy was... An enigma. I didn't see her much. I was a bit distracted with my hatchling, my room mates, my crush and my work but from what I did see she seemed to be more refined than the others. Oh, she could be eaten with the best of them but she belonged in conventional society more. Indeed it is perhaps worth noting that while Sammy or Lisa would be used either as a draw to pull in punters or a sold as dish, Amy was never an official part of pub business, rather she preferred to stalk the pub floors interposing herself between any Contravoxai on the hunt and their intended prey. Like if Batman decided to stop muggings by intercepting the muggers and handing them a suitcase full of cash.

*

I awoke to a smelly arsehole in my face. I coughed and proceeded to splutter and choke as I proceeded to knock my hatchling onto the floor from her sleeping position on top of me. She was almost fully grown now and I felt increasingly dodgy about her nakedness and the necessities of cleaning up after a pet animal with Cat like instincts and behaviour but a person's body.

She rolled onto her belly and stood on all 4s, her long blonde hair a mess on her head. She emitted a familiar inhuman keening sound.

I sat up in bed, swung my legs over the edge of the bed and stroked her head. “Hey, girl, I’m sorry. I just don’t like having your bottom in my face.”

She looked at me, looked into my eyes and said. “Master”

I stared at her. “What?”

“Master.” she repeated. “You’re my Master.”

I frowned then shrugged. “I guess I am and you-”

She closed her eyes and shuddered. “Can remember everything.”

Suddenly she was hugging me and said. “Your whole world, I’m so sorry.”

I patted her back and said. “It’s alright, I’m fine. Better now that you’re thinking. Go have a shower and put some clothes on then we are heading to the bar.”

She nodded and went for that shower.

*

I wore a suit and my hatchling had her hair pulled back in a ponytail as she sported one of Lisa’s lace up bikinis, a blouse and shorts worn with a belt. We approached the bar and Eliza grinned when she saw us.

“Your little hatchling’s remembered who she is, hasn’t she?” asked Eliza excitedly.

I nodded and patted my hatchling’s back. “Yeah, she’s a good girl.”

My hatchling closed her eyes and shuddered as something occurred to her then she turned to look at me. “I was created so you could drink my blood wasn’t I?”

I frowned and scratched the back of my neck. “Sorry but it’s just until I get the cure.”

My hatchling regarded me for a long moment then she nodded. “Okay, I’ll do it but I’m still your baby girl, understand? Just because you’re drinking from me and I can talk doesn’t change the fact that I’m your puppy.”

I nodded and booped her nose. “I’m not abandoning you.”

My hatchling grinned then said. “Eliza, make it quick yeah.”

Eliza reached over the bar, slit my hatchling’s throat, filled a pint glass then wrapped a bandage round her neck to heal the wound.

I caught my hatchling and held her for a long moment.

Finally she whispered. “Take me to my room, let me recover.”

“I will.” I said gently. “Don’t worry.”

I picked up my pint.

Eliza said. “You should let Merle know. Now you’re ready to move he can take Sammy to this Contravoxai contact she has.”

I nodded.

*

I returned with Merle to find Eliza chatting with Sammy. The conversation stopped as we approached.

Sammy turned to look at me and she swallowed nervously. She was wearing a loose white dress and her hair cascaded down her back. “This is goodbye.” She said as she extended her hand to shake. I took it and she pulled me into a hug and said. “Start again and make a home, Steve. I want you to be happy, you understand? Forget about me and live your life the best way you can.”

Then she pulled back, looked me in the eyes and kissed me on the lips.

I was stunned and confused.

Sammy spoke to Merle and then he stripped her and lowered her whole inside his mouth.

I watched Merle walk away as Eliza took my hand and handed me a tumbler of Pass-Through Brandy.

*

Merle rang the doorbell of a plush apartment building. A video speaker system activated and an upperclass looking Contravoxai gent interrogated his would be guest. “Who rings my doorbell at this hour? I’ve got company.”

Merle waved at the camera. “David isn’t it? I was at your baptism. I must say you’ve done well for yourself.”

The gent on the screen quivered his tentacles excitedly. “Merle isn’t it? Great Uncle Merle? Come on up.”

The door buzzed open and instead of taking the elevator Merle opted to fly up the ladder shaft to David’s floor. He then walked down a suitably spacious hallway until he found David’s door and knocked upon it.

David welcomed Merle with open tentacles and hugged him then patted his back “Come in, come in, I’ve just had the winner of Mr Contravoxai delivered, you’re more than welcome to have first go.”

Merle held up his tentacles. “I’m just here to make a delivery myself actually.”

David stared at him. “What kind?”

Merle opened his mouth, reached inside with a few of his tentacles and pulled out Sammy.

Sammy stood, dripping acid on a rich shag pile carpet, and waved as she blushed from embarrassment.

David stared at her. “How?”

“She’s a copy.” said Merle bluntly. “Created to aid in someone’s escape.”

David nodded and extended a tentacle to clear the hair from Sammy’s face. “Shower’s the third door on the left, honey. Don’t worry about clothes.”

Sammy nodded and went to have a shower.

“You were in the Great Grafilod War weren’t you?” asked David.

Merle nodded. “I did my bit for the great Leader, Contravoxai and Vligury. Why do you ask?”

“They say you cast magic on the battlefield, that it’s how you survived and beat back the Grafilods.” said David, enquiringly.

Merle shrugged. “Is it magic to drink refined alcohol, exude it from your suckers and set light to it? Is it magic to vent your stomach acid out those same suckers and dissolve the enemy alive?”

David laughed. “They say you moved with impossible speed and would always turn up exactly when you needed to to turn the tide of battle, that you had impossible foreknowledge?”

Merle chuckled. “I was merely lucky and had good hunches.”

“Well either way, there’s a storm coming and I am glad to know that you are on the side of the oppressed.” said David.

Merle looked curiously at David. “What storm?”

David shrugged. “Ever since Father decided to let that planet go and declare surrender the might of the Emperor has looked weak. The lower classes are getting restless, starvation is driving desperate Contravoxai to theft and riots have been breaking out more and more. Even among the higher orders doubt in the system is commonplace, and many are talking in secret about the need for regime change. Those that are supportive are terrified and planning escape routes for when the shit hits the fan. And all father does is attend meetings where he and his trusted elite rub their infinite Vligury supply in the faces of the servants.”

Merle looked sombre. “Can’t you talk to your father?”

“It’s too dangerous.” said David. “I am next in line to succeed him. If I even try to caution him to reason I might be seen as a traitor and if I make the necessary displays to appease the justifiable concerns then I risk painting an even larger target on myself. It is best remain neutral and see if I can’t keep my father alive and my society stable.”

Merle nodded sagely. “Very wise. For what it’s worth the Vligury don’t seem to be revolting.”

“Of course not.” said David. “Yes, we take from their populace but we also provide them with free healthcare, food, clothing, entertainment and homes. They go to slaughter but their lives are happy. It is only the Contravoxai who suffer inequality and artificial scarcity.”

Merle nodded then said. “What might it mean if the Vligury were to join the revolution?”

“The mercy of a quick revolution.” said David bluntly. “If the Vligury refuse to go willingly, if they shout and scream as they go then that will turn things quickly.” David snorted. “The drawback of having meat that talks back. Plus the Vligury outnumber us by a massive scale. Alright, we can easily dismember them but they have a society that is already set up to sustain massive casualties and if they can arm themselves enough to blind or disarm us we are entirely at their mercy regardless of their capacity to kill us.”

Merle nodded then said. “Well I’m not going to be leading any revolution, I’m just a homeless war veteran who was given the courtesy of a lovely meal in return for delivering this one to you. Enjoy her David, she’s a very sweet young lady.”

David nodded and said. “You could join me for dinner? I’m sure I could let you have an arm or a leg.”

Merle chuckled and said. “Oh I’ve got quite the feast waiting for me when I get back. I’ll see you around.”

Then Merle left.

Sammy reentered the room and coughed lightly. “Hi.”

David turned so his legs were heading towards Sammy and he approached her with open tentacles. “Sammy, my dear, it’s been quite a while.”

Sammy chuckled awkwardly. “Well I am here on business.”

“I know.” said David with a curt nod of his head then he folded his tentacles around Sammy so they lightly brushed her skin. “There will be time for that later. Shall we dance?”

Sammy shivered with excitement as she felt the tentacles enfold her, not trapping her, just ready to support her. She checked around for the tentacles that would take the weight of her feet and tentacles that had been positioned to act as support rails. She knew that taking hold of the rails and letting her feet touch tentacle instead of carpet would mean the dance would begin so she smirked and did just that.

Sammy gripped David’s long hard tentacles and felt him tighten his grip about her. Strong tentacles hugged her waist and wrapped themselves around her arms. She lifted her left food tentatively off the carpet and onto the waiting foot rest, tentacles snaked around her ankle and calf, holding her steady. Finally she lifted her right foot off the carpet and David held her tight.

“Thank you.” said David and he stroked her hair, smoothing it down, as they talked. He turned on some

Contravoxai classical music and proceeded to take Sammy in a kind of waltz as he asked. “Do you remember how we met?”

Sammy chuckled as she looked into David’s ring of eye stalks. “The great Leader was out on some kind of hunting trip for the anniversary of his ascension to the throne and he stopped for a picnic as one of his bards played the Caspraylas.”

David nodded and felt a tentacle down Sammy’s right arm until it reached her hand. “He wanted to teach me about what it meant to rule.” David carefully snapped the little finger of Sammy’s right hand off and tossed it into the gaping mouth atop his head. “Does that hurt?”

“No.” said Sammy quizzically, there had been no sensation to that at all, just a sudden absence.

“Good.” said David as he snapped off the ring finger of her right hand.

Sammy mused on this but decided to continue the conversation. “The Great Leader pulled me out of his picnic hamper, as with the rest of his morsels, and you decided to dance with me?”

David nodded. “I did it to spite my father at first, playing with the Great Leader’s food.”

Sammy chuckled. “I rather enjoyed it, you were very sweet.”

David pulled the last two fingers and thumb of her right hand from her body and tossed them into his mouth before he said. “I enjoyed it too and I am rather afraid that I started to fall for you.”

Sammy blushed and wiggled the fingers of her left hand as an invitation. “I am sorry, you were so young then, I do hope I didn’t turn you into a deviant?”

One of David’s tentacles grabbed Sammy’s left hand gently, caressed her fingers as another booped her on the nose. “My dear, you saved me that night, saved my soul, you opened my eyes to the obvious truth that Vligury have heart and soul.”

“But I’m not Vligury.” said Sammy pointedly.

“No.” said David as he tossed her remaining fingers and thumb into his mouth. “And that is why I can love you and eat you too. You are unique, my dear girl.”

Sammy smirked. “Well I’m very flattered. I must admit I do rather- Well that is to say that if - In another life. - I was yours... I could be very happy.”

“Except this is another life.” said David and he stroked her cheek with a tentacle. “You are a copy.”

Sammy blushed and said. “Don’t play with your food.”

“I’m not playing.” said David as Sammy’s toes disappeared into his mouth. “We could be very happy together.”

“I’ll think about it.” said Sammy seriously. “But there is someone else.”

David nodded. “I understand.” Then he changed subject and asked. “What do you want to watch when I’m done with you?”

Sammy shrugged. “I don’t normally get a choice, I just sort of get bunged somewhere while I recover.”

“Well that’s not happening this time.” said David sweetly. “I’ll leave you with the TV, it’s voice operated so you’ll be fine. Just give me a shout if you need anything. I have plenty of alcohol.”

Sammy laughed. “Thank you, that’s very kind. I just want us to talk business tomorrow.”

“And we will.” said David, then he felt a tentacle up Sammy’s right thigh until it lightly encircled the leg below the bum. “Now, my dear, before I properly eat I need to know that you are okay with this?”

Sammy chuckled. “Of course, but let me feel it.”

David nodded. “As you wish.”

Sammy gasped as her right leg was pulled and twisted with such ferocity that muscle and bone were shorn.

“It hurts doesn’t it? I’m so sorry.” said David sadly.

Sammy panted and watched him heave her leg inside the cavern of his mouth and longed to bathe in his stomach acid. “I am a Sylph, boy, I love the pain.”

David chuckled and stroked her cheek. “Oh my dear, I did not know.”

Crack Her ankle was disconnected.

Sheeonk! Her lower leg was ripped off at the knee.

Pla-Shphoom! Her left leg was torn from her bum.

Sammy panted in exquisite agony as she watched the three pieces of her leg ascend into David’s mouth.

“Thank you” breathed Sammy.

Then Sammy screamed in a delightful ecstasy of pain her arms were torn from her body.

David cradled Sammy in his tentacles and carried her into his living room and a waiting sofa and TV. He stroked her cheek and said. “You were delicious as always, my dear.”

*

Sammy woke up naked in a large expensively decorated luxurious double bed. She got up from it and studied the room, bookshelves lined with Romance, Fantasy, Crime and Scifi novels. A voice activated large smart TV. A fridge freezer and microwave oven. There was even an en-suite bathroom and shower.

Sammy was about to head into the shower when she noticed the large wooden wardrobe and the dress hanging over a full length mirror.

*

Sammy found David in the kitchen of the large apartment making a Contravoxai Fried Breakfast of various alien meat slabs and strange fruit and vegetables. “Room on your plate for me?” she asked.

David laughed. “Oh, I have a delightful little marinade planned for you later, but for now we have business to attend to. How did you find your room?”

“My room?” asked Sammy with a laugh. “Don’t tell me, you knew I was coming?”

David seemed to think for a second as he focused on frying his breakfast, then he said. “No, not as such. I did however suspect that sooner or later you would find the Great Leader’s plate a little dull and I guess I hoped you would come to me. That room has served as the guest room for any passing Vligury but it was designed in hope of you and it is yours, if you want it?”

Sammy stared at David. “You are kidding me? I knew we- Well that there was something, but I just thought it was hunger. That room is gorgeous.”

David nodded and plated up his food. “Like you, especially in that dress. Do you like it?”

“Well yes.” said Sammy as she raised her arms and twirled to show off the blue satin dress. “I love it, but why? I’m just food.”

David shook his head and started shovelling his food into his mouth. “You are delicious, do not misunderstand me, but you are far more than just another morsel. You are sweet, kind and funny and you have inspired revolution by showing the Contravoxai that Vligury are thoroughly lovable.”

Contravoxai chairs were strange alien things so Sammy took a seat on the table beside him. “I’m just a girl who likes to have fun. I’m not intending to cause revolution.”

“I know.” said David gently. “And that’s why you’re succeeding.” He reached out with a tentacle and stroked her cheek. “You are just so... Alive! So vibrant and full of passion, joy and fun that you become the reason people watch the great Leader.”

Sammy smiled and grabbed his tentacle. She rubbed her cheek against it.

David stiffened.

Sammy kissed the tip of the tentacle and said. “Me and this other person, we’re not exactly exclusive you know.”

Sammy looked at the tentacle curiously and stroked it.

David shivered with excitement. “Well I have done some... Research. We could have an... Experiment?”

Sammy grinned and tentatively licked the tip of the tentacle.

David muttered. “I am going to rot in the annows with Mincham for this.”

He reached out with a tentacle and stroked her hair.

Sammy smirked. “Oh, I am going to have fun with you.”

David chuckled as his tentacle unzipped the back of her dress.

Sammy said. “The safe word is kangaroo.” then she placed her lips around David’s throbbing tentacle.

*

Sammy stepped out of the shower to find David on a Contravoxai couch and watching a TV show where two Contravoxai were talking behind the cover of a sofa as a tall scary Contravoxai approached with an axe.

A large metal tub, filled with steaming water, was between David’s legs as his many tentacles chopped and prepared various herbs and vegetables.

“That was an experience.” said Sammy with a chuckle.

“Indeed it was.” said David with wry amusement. “I do hope I proved satisfactory.”

Sammy nodded and closed her eyes. “You were... Certainly that. But being doused by 36 tentacles? Not so fun.”

David blushed. “Sorry.”

Sammy smirked. “It’s fine.” then she approached the tub. “So what’s this? You still want to eat me after that?”

David shrugged. “Just a little marinade while we attend to your business. Think of it like a hot tub.”

Sammy laughed and climbed in.

David’s tentacles reached in with knives and started slashing at her beneath the water line.

Sammy gasped and asked. “What are you doing? I mean I’m fine with it, but why?”

“You can heal.” said David gently. “So I am hoping to cut you up just enough that the herbs and spices will infuse with you and that you will have properly healed by the time you’re done marinading. The meat flakes and blood will aid the flavour. Plus I have removed most of your liver because I want you nice and boozy. Just for eating, nothing else, I swear.”

Sammy nodded and said with mock seriousness. “Well just so long as you’re getting me boozy so you can eat me. Heaven forbid you buy me a drink before another bout of experimentation.”

David chuckled then said. “So, now that you’re marinading, why are you here? What do you need me for?”

“There’s a man...” said Sammy carefully.

David nodded. “What kind? Contravoxai or Vligury?”

“Human.” said Sammy bluntly. “Like me. His whole world has been razed to the ground by your people. He would be dead if not for me.”

“So you want me to get him to safety?” asked David curiously.

“He’s safe now.” said Sammy carefully. “More or less. I need you to contact someone who can take him to a world where humanity still lives and thrives. I want him freed from this madness to live as a normal person again.”

“You love him, don’t you?” asked David pointedly.

Sammy fell silent and felt the sides of the tub. She might not be bathed in stomach acid but it was close enough to let her feel safe. “Yes.” she admitted.

David stroked her cheek compassionately. “Except you aren’t real, are you? You’re a copy. Sammy loves this man, Sammy wants him safe and would do anything for him but you aren’t her. Not really?”

Sammy swallowed. “She deserves him, not me. I’m just an asset to be thrown away and disposed of.”

“Well I love you.” said David sweetly. “Now what do you need?”

“A phone.” said Sammy.

“You came all this way for a phone?” asked David with a chuckle.

“It needs to not be traceable.” said Sammy pointedly.

David nodded then he got up to fetch a phone.

Sammy stared at her reflection and said. “Look after him, won’t you? I know I was just a means to an end but I love him just as much as you.”

David returned with a phone and handed it to Sammy.

Sammy dialed and a male voice answered.

“Hello, Frederick Hamish Pearson speaking. Seghat piloting, person taming and monster killing at an hourly rate, how may I help you?”

Sammy said. “Frederick, it’s me Sammy. I don’t know if you remember Anthony’s wedding...”

“Oh yeah...” said the voice at the other end enthusiastically. “You are the cute little thing that volunteered to not only be my toy but also my pet. I had a lot of fun with you. Last I heard Anthony had decided to turn you into a statue in his hall of heroes after that Spranghurst job. What’s changed?”

“Well, you recall how I had a copy of myself join the other Anthony at the Contravoxai banquet?” asked Sammy carefully.

“Oh, bless you...” said Frederick sweetly. “Staying with your Master, even if it means climbing into the frying pan. How’s that working out for you? I might pop round for dinner, see how you are.”

“Thanks, that’d be nice.” said Sammy, takenaback. “But I actually need to ask a favour. I need someone taken to Choice World and the care of Anthony.”

“And how are you going to pay me?” asked Frederick pointedly.

“Pay you?” asked Sammy, confused.

“Don’t get me wrong, you’re a lovely girl, Sammy.” said Frederick gently. “It’s just that I already own you. So I don’t... Well, you’ve got nothing to offer me have you?”

Sammy stammered. “I-I-I need help. Just help me, please?”

“Sammy, I’m a mercenary and you want me to smuggle someone out of a Contravoxai mothership, without payment. You must be having a laugh.” said Frederick bluntly.

David took the phone from Sammy and said. “You are distressing my marinade, explain yourself.”

Frederick laughed. “Calling for help as she’s being marinaded? God, I love that girl. Anyway, my fine gentleman, the point of the matter is that you lot are scary and I don’t work for free.”

David nodded. “I see”

Sammy mouthed. “What’s he saying?”

David handed Sammy a glass of brown liquid.

Sammy reached out to grab the glass and David casually snapped off her little finger and dropped it into the marinade.

David said. “What if I could make sure you were safe on the Comtravoxai ship?”

Frederick mused. “How?”

“Well, a little birdie tells me there’s going to be a revolution and one way or another I’m going to be in a position to influence the society that emerges. You help out my Sammy and I will see that you can hunt any Contravoxai, Vligury or Human on this ship that you can convince to willingly go with you and I will personally serve Sammy up to you by way of thanks.” said David carefully.

Frederick thought for a long moment then said. “That is a very big promise so I am not going to dick

you about. I'll do this one regardless, but if ever you need me, so long as your end stands, I'm your man. Oh and break Sammy's legs for me, cheeky of her to ask me to do something for nothing."

"Deal." said David then he hung up the phone and tossed it onto the couch as he reached his tentacles under the water.

Sammy gasped. "What was that for?"

"Your man is getting a lift to Choice World." said David cheerfully then he topped up Sammy's glass and said. "Now drink my love and be oh so merry."

Sammy grinned and knocked back the drink then she grimaced. "Quite the kick"

David nodded. "Because I want you to have quite the kick." then he leaned back and watched his TV show as Sammy marinaded and got obscenely drunk.

*

I was at the bar and drank a pint of blood as Roxy and Fiora cooed over my hatchling.

Lisa had been forbidden from going of the spit in case word arrived about leaving so she compromised with Eliza and was being carefully carved up to provide the most meat without affecting her ability to walk, run or think.

Amy had already let us know that she was staying and so she was on the spit instead.

Charlotte was taking advantage of Amy's turn on the spit but was keeping an ear to the ground, in case it came time to say goodbye.

Eliza was busy serving punters but I saw her watching me carefully when she could. I suppose she worried for me. I knew she would be happy though, happy to have Helga to herself again.

David arrived and turned his legs to face in Fiora and Roxy's direction. "Well if this isn't a delightful sight, a sweet little lesbian couple. I was feeling rather hungry."

I reached behind the bar pulled out the plasma rifle and stood between David and my friends. "Oi! Fucko! These are not for eating!"

Fiora added. "And we're pansexual, not lesbian."

"That too." I said with a nod.

I tried to stare down the creature. Not easy when it has more eyes than you can easily count or calculate. Then again, I always was bad at maths.

The creature chuckled. "You're Sammy's boy, aren't you?"

"What?" I said.

The creature elaborated. “The one Sammy rescued and created a copy of herself to see escape? You are the man who is going to bring about revolution?”

I shook my head. “I just want to live my life in peace.”

“Steven Banks, the man who lived.” said the creature. “Yes, I see now why she chose you. A true hero, aren’t you?”

I stared at him open mouthed in incomprehension then asked. “Who are you?”

“I am David. Or at least that is what Humans and Vligury call me. I am next in line for the throne and my uncle is the great Leader of the Contravoxai and I am also the man who has secured you safe passage out of here.” said the creature.

“It’s true!” said Merle as he ran into the pub then panted to catch his breath. “I was at his naming, this is the man who is going to see that the revolution happens smoothly.”

“Right...” I said uncertainly. “And where’s Sammy?”

David froze, he thought desperately before finally he exclaimed. “Marinading!”

“She’s coming with me.” I said firmly. “This whole thing was her idea.”

David nodded carefully, his tentacles waved carefully in the air to show his nervous supplication. “It was but she’s mine now.”

“Uh-huh.” I said and steadied the plasma rifle. “And just why is that?”

David looked around frantically, as if for some kind of advantage. “Because she’s a submissive woman. She likes the pain, likes the feeling of helplessness and being dominated by someone she trusts. She’s a fucking food animal. You think she’s going to settle down with you and have 2.4 children? You think she’s going to cook the turkey on Christmass day? She is the turkey and I love her for that.”

I lowered the rifle. “You love her?”

David nodded. “I know it’s wrong. She’s a... Vliguroid. I’m supposed to find her disgusting, it’s supposed to be like bestiality to be with her. I eat her for Leader’s sake and I love the taste of her flesh but I also love her heart and soul. She is the sweetest, kindest, most adorable and delicious thing in existence. I can’t part with her. I just can’t.”

I stared at him.

Merle patted a compassionate tentacle against my shoulder and muttered something about star crossed lovers.

I swallowed and nodded. “Look, I’m not a Vligury and I’m not a Contravoxai, to me you are all fucking weird but you are right she does love it and that is a part of her I can’t share in but you can... Look after her for me and remember that no matter how much she may enjoy - What you do together. -

She is a person and deserves to be treated as an equal."

Carla announced suddenly. "Take me with you."

Helga had Carla on the end of a tight leash in a gimp suit as she stopped by to check on the bar but Carla had spat out the ball gag to make the announcement.

Helga was stunned into silence.

Carla said. "Sammy is my best friend, if you are going to eat her for all eternity, you're taking me as well."

David looked to Helga.

Helga reluctantly nodded.

In a few moments David had stripped Carla of the suit.

Lisa ran to join her.

Carla shook her head and kissed Lisa.

Lisa looked imploringly into Carla's eyes. "Where you go, I go."

Carla looked into her eyes and said. "I'm sorry but you'll get over me, you need attention. Stay with Steve, I'm sure Anthony's got a copy of me somewhere."

I stared at Carla. "Are you sure? You shouldn't have to separate."

Carla looked to me and said. "I love her very much but she's just a toy. There are so many of her out there, she doesn't need me. You can give her what she needs, I'm sure."

Lisa looked to me, tears streamed down her face and I hugged her. "It'll be alright." I said, not thatt I really believed it myself.

I saw Eliza take Helga's hand tentatively and watched the older woman shift her attention to her employee. Eliza winked at me.

Then reality seemed to rend in two as a great gale started up out of nowhere and with a great stammering "Sh!" a rickety wooden shed materialised into existence, in the center of the pub. A man in a ridiculous mismatched suit stepped out.

"Who the fuck are you?" I asked.

"Frederick Hamish Pearson, at your service." said the man as he surveyed the room. "Now which one of you is David and which one is Steven."

"Steven." I said with a wave.

“David” said David as he quietly began dismembering Carla.

Charlotte charged down the stairs and said. “I’m not too late am I?”

“And who might you be?” asked Frederick.

“Charlotte” She said as she panted.

Frederick grinned “A lady Contravoxai, I might have to remember you, always did like a challenge.”

Charlotte brushed past him and sentt him tumbling into Roxy and Fiora.

“So this is goodbye?” she asked, extending a tentacle.

I shook it. “Looks like it. Look after Amy, won’t you? Make sure she has always a home to go to and a friend to turn to should this get a bit much for her.”

“Of course.” she said sweetly. “And I’ll make sure Eliza sees the occasional sunlight and the Lucys are well kept.”

I smirked.

She said. “You look after your hatchling, okay? And get a hobby, one that doesn’t involve drinking.”

I nodded then said. “You know in a way, I almost regret that you never got a chance to taste me.”

She laughed and pulled me into a hug then she handed me a card. “My multiversal coordinates, in case you fancy stopping by once you’ve got the cure...”

I laughed and patted what felt like her back.

Carla smiled at Charlotte then hugged me herself. “I better go.” she said raising her fingerless left hand. “David’s getting a little peckish.”

A tentacle lashed out and her hand disappeared.

Carla smirked then said. “Remember, play with Lisa everyday, she needs lots of attention, and live a good life, yeah? You deserve it.”

“You too.” I said as a tentacle stole her left arm away entirely. “Or at least whatever passes for a good life by your standards.”

Carla laughed and she was lifted bodily into the air, carefully dissected so she would heal and not accidentally create a clone then placed into some kind of plastic bag that was then sealed and placed inside David’s mouth.

“She’ll be perfectly fine.” said David. “They both will and for what it’s worth I wish you the best of luck in finding love and happiness in the future.”

I nodded and went to get my hatchling.

Fiora said. “See you around sometime, yeah? Make sure you get us that cure.”

I smirked and hugged her. “Don’t worry. Merle’s a good egg, you’re safe.”

Roxy tutted. “Fiora, don’t put pressure on the lad. Just go forward in all your beliefs, Steven, and prove to us that we are not mistaken in ours. Though to tell you the truth I’m quite looking forward to being eaten now. Your girls have made it look such fun.”

I hugged her and said. “Thank you, both of you, you gave me hope and friendship when I had so very little. Enjoy yourselves, however things turn out.”

They smiled at me and Frederick caught my eye. “Cute, aren’t they?”

I smirked. “Yes. Yes, they are, what of it?”

Frederick leaned between Roxy and Fiora asnd spread his arms round the backs of each. “How would you like to be my toys?”

Fiora said. “We’ve, um, rather got a date with destiny.” Then she pointed at Merle.

“I can copy you.” said Frederick pointedly. “And I can even save the data in the memory buffer. Should anything happen the yous as you are now could be printed out fresh.”

“And what would their being toys entail?” I asked, I figured that a couple of girls that headed merrily to the slaughter were unlikely to care to ask such a question.

“I will, with their consent, tame them to the point of complete and total subservience and submissiveness.” said Frederick cheerrfully. “No agency whatsoever by the time I’m done, but don’t worry, they’ll be immortal with mental failsafes to prevent ‘And I Must Scream’ scenarios and will utterly enjoy ever moment of it.”

I stared at him.

Roxy giggled. “Sounds fun.”

Fiora mused. “Certainly would be an interesting experience.”

David said. “You can’t actually stop him. He’s technically got a license to tame anybody, including me.”

I sighed. “Well if I can’t stop you...”

“Then lets enter the ship.” said Frederick as he led Fiora and Roxy inside.

My hatchling yawned and asked. “Is it time to go?”

“Yes.” I said and I gave her a friendly stroke then secured my leash to her collar.

Lisa took my hand and said. “Lead on, MacDuff.”

I stared at her. “You know Shakespeare?”

She smirked. “I was a university student before I was tamed.”

Eliza said. “Hey...”

I turned to look at her and she was handing me a fresh bottle of Passthrough Brandy. “Takes a lot to get a wereshark drunk, especially if you don’t remove the liver. Take this.”

I smiled.

Lisa took the brandy for me, as I currently had my hands full.

“Thank you.” I said.

“No, thank you.” said Eliza earnestly. “And sorry about the whole leading you to your death thing earlier. Orders are orders.”

“Don’t mention it.” I said with a shudder.

Helga gave me a curious look then said. “You have challenged my authority, made my colleagues unreasonably chippy and been mean to my customers so I really do hope that you will go away for good but, for what it’s worth, I have had the most fantastic time since you’ve been here and business has boomed. Now go away and never ever return.”

I smirked and said. “Look after Eliza. I think she’s missed you.”

Then I turned and walked into the shed with my hatchling and Lisa.

*

The shed was much much bigger on the inside with a mushroom shaped center console and a general art deco appearence. A coffin sized trunk lay in one part of the room and a large cage containing several scantily clad women filled a large portion of the room.

“Remember that trunk.” said Frederick to Fiora and Roxy. “That’s where I’ll throw you when I get bored of you.”

They nodded appreciatively.

“Ah!” said Frederick as he turned to look at me. “I would recognise that look of disdain anywhere. Come on, I don’t want you getting lost in here.”

The five of us followed Frederick through many long corridors until at last we got to an area that looked much darker and more industrial. There were two sealed off chambers with glass walls and doors.

“Now, it works like Star Trek, person goes in booth one, is scanned and then materialises in booth two. The difference is that the original does not get destroyed, so Fiora, Roxy, into booth one please and close your eyes.” said Frederick.

Fiora and Roxy entered booth one and closed their eyes.

Frederick moved to a console situated between the doors to the two booths and started the sequence.

There was a sound like a klaxon and lights strobed as the doors to both booths were locked and the scanning commenced. After a minute Frederick’s hands danced across the console and a second Fiora and Roxy materialised from thin air in booth 2. The klaxon noise died down and the strobing stopped then the doors were unlocked.

Frederick moved to open the door to booth two and he touched Fiora and Roxy. They opened their eyes and turned to him.

“Which ones are we?” asked Fiora.

“Food or toys?” asked Roxy.

Frederick grinned ecstatically. “Oh, you are mine, my pretty little toys.”

Roxy blushed. “This is going to be fun.”

Fiora asked. “So what happens now?”

“You stay here and wait for me to do what I will with you. Your real selves have to be escorted out along with that boy and his girls.” said Frederick cheerfully. “Tame you later.”

Fiora smirked.

Roxy looked to Fiora and said. “I think I know how we can pass the time.”

Fiora grinned.

Frederick opened booth 1 and then led the original Fiora and Roxy with me, my hatchling and Lisa back to the control room.

We hugged then Fiora and Roxy left.

Frederick danced around the console, pulling levers and pushing buttons until at last with a flourish we landed and he strode out the door.

I followed with Lisa and the hatchling to find a tall man in a three piece suit who reclined in an armchair as he smoked a pipe and read a copy of Doctor Who Magazine.

The seated man glared over the top of his magazine at Frederick. “Freddy, do you recall the words I said when last we met?”

Frederick nodded. “Leave now and never come back or so help me I will possess your body and force you to watch helpless as you skin yourself alive.”

“Did you think I was bluffing?” asked the seated man very calmly.

“No” said Frederick nervusly. “But I’m being paid very well and this job comes from Sammy.”

“Sammy is dead.” said the seated man with a finality that made my heart sink.

“You forget the copy she had join the Contravoxai.” said Frederick bluntly.

“And how does a submissive woman who gets eaten alive every day have the ability to pay you?” asked the seated man pointedly.

“She doesn’t.” said Frederick with a smile. “But she knows someone who does and... Well, lets just say he has a very fine reason for wanting to help her out.”

“Oh?” asked the seated man.

Frederick coughed then announced with as much pomp and circumstance as he could muster. “May I present Steven Banks, lone survivor of the Contravoxai and rival for the dear girl’s heart.”

“Ah...” said the seated man. He placed a bookmark in his Doctor Who magazine and rode from his seat. “She wants him gone because she loves him and your paymaster wants him gone for the exact same reason, I see now. Very well, you may leave with your skin intact.”

“Thank you kindly.” said Frederick before he ran inside the shed and left sharpish.

I stared at the tall man and swallowed. “Can you really… Do that?”

He nodded then said. “I am Anthony Maxwell Jago. I used to be like you, Human, then things happened when I moved here to Choice World and I became harder, tougher. I was eaten alive trying to send a message to the Contravoxai, a message of peace, and then something happened, something bad and I had to sacrifice myself to the Contravoxai, you may have seen me there. I left my heart with someone I trusted and that was when I learned I had passed the test to become Sheriff of Choice World and I have power the likes of which you could scarcely imagine.”

“Then why didn’t you save yourself?” I asked.

Anthony shook his head. “If I did that not only would I risk creating war where there could be peace but I would be saving one life in return for many. The me on the Contravoxai ship is practically immortal, countless Vligury are saved just by his being there to be eaten instead.”

My hatchling asked. “Do you have a sylph pill?”

Anthony regarded her for a moment then tickled her chin. “Lucy isn’t it? I swear I’ve got my own of you, I think Yrgritte is just playing with her now. Why do you need a sylph pill?”

“She doesn’t.” I said. “Sammy saved me by turning me into a wereshark. I’ve been surviving, keeping my sanity, by drinking Lucy’s blood.”

“Oh! Oh, my poor baby. Are you alright, Lucy?” said Anthony as he fussed over the Hatchling.

Lucy shrugged. “It’s better than the war and being eaten alive by the Contravoxai every day.”

Lisa sniffed. “Some of us like that, okay?”

Anthony gazed off into the distance then said. “You chose to stay with me didn’t you? You sacrificed yourself so I might have company? Oh, I am sorry.”

I said. “Actually, she’s a hatchling. Obviously none of the girls could leave so they just gave me their hearts as clones to help me but the people who looked after me rather took a shine to the, umm, original clone and consider it helpful to have an egg layer I suppose. I raised this hatchling myself.”

“Aww...” cooed Anthony as he stroked Lucy’s hair as one might the coat of a Labrador. “You’re properly imprinted on him now, aren’t you?”

Lucy grinned.

“Right, well, I can certainly find you a Sylph pill but who are you going to imprint on?” asked Anthony.

I stared at him.

“Well we can make lab grown Sylph blood so you’ve got time.” said Anthony with a shrug. “Meanwhile who is this little thing?”

Lisa laughed. “You can’t recognise me because of the carvings can you? And I suppose we didn’t really meet much...”

Anthony smiled weakly. “Well I was trying not to mention that.”

“It’s Lisa.” said Lisa with a laugh. “Remember your wedding?”

“Oh, of course.” said Anthony with a sudden grin. “I was worried but you... Did you say you like it?”

Lisa grinned. “Very much so. I know this seems like a long shot but is there anyway I might be eaten here?”

Anthony thought for a second then said. “It’s possible, I’ll have a word with Yrgritte, see if she can’t whip something up for you?”

Lisa beamed.

I said “Umm... A bit of context please?”

“Oh, yes. Of course you weren’t there, were you?” said Anthony cheerfully. “When I got married it

was sort of a big thing. The Contravoxai visited as guests and so did the elder god Bam-Kursh. She technically owns all Lisas in existence. Literally patented her genome, look, mind and soul. This is largely so the Bam-Kursh can sell her toys but the upshot of which is that any universe with a naturally born Lisa in it that joins the United Civilizations of the Multiverse - That's a peacekeeping thing like the EU - is then subject to its laws and patents and thus trillions of real naturally occurring Lisas are quietly apprehended. I believe the majority are now allowed to continue their lives but every now and again the Bam-Kursh decides to enforce her rights and on my wedding day not only did she give me a couple to use as I wished but she also gave one to the Contravoxai."

"Right..." I said with a frown. "And who's Yrgritte and how can she help Lisa with her umm... Desires?"

"She's my wife." said Anthony with a grin. "And a charicthy, a kind of sapient shark from a different universe. She is, as we speak, using our Lisa as target practise in her breaching pool. You're kind of lucky you got me to be honest, my wife would have taken full advantage of you. As it is I merely want you to be happy, as I wish all people. So take a seat, I will fetch your Lucy some kibble and see if I can't help your Lisa end the day in someone's belly."

"Right..." I said as I took a seat in his armchair.

Lisa grinned and strode off with Anthony.

Lucy took a seat between my legs and said. "Massage me."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I want to bliss out at your hands and I think you need the distraction." said Lucy casually.

I sighed. "I shall have to get used to having a pet that's smarter than me, won't I?"

Lucy shrugged. "Not necesarily. If Frederick can tame Fiora and Roxy into being utterly obedient and passive toys, you can tame me into being a bit thick."

"Would that be right?" I asked curiously.

Lucy shrugged. "I don't mind either way, I just want you to be happy and if your being happy means lowering my IQ score by a few points then so be it. I mean lets face it you've already drunk my blood, bit late to worry about morality."

I laughed bitterly and started massaging her shoulders and neck.

Anthony arrived with my bottle of Passthrough Brandy and a large glass of something red and frothing. "Lisa is now in my wife's very capable hands. I'll see that she is cleaned and returned to you when she recovers from Yrgritte's culinary experimentation. She had this on her person incidentally, said it was yours. I thought you might need it so I've made you a Bloody Mary with artificial Sylph's blood, should keep you sane and ruin even a wereshark's sobriety but I can remove your liver as well if you think you need it."

I chuckled and waved away his offer. "Thank you but I think my liver is fine just where it is."

He nodded, smiled and plonked the Bloody Mary and Passthrough Brandy on a table beside the armchair. He returned a moment later with a bowl full of pet food.

Lucy stared at it. “Umm, I hope you don’t really expect me to eat that?”

Anthony laughed and ruffled her hair before he pulled up an armchair so he could sit opposite us. “No, not yet anyway but it is the brand my Amy likes, and like you she turns her nose up at it when lucid, only to prefer it to a steak when suitably tame.”

Lucy mused. “It would seem my stomach depends upon my Master’s ability to bliss me out.”

I snorted. “I raised you from a tiny little thing, have faith.”

Lucy nodded.

“So?” said Anthony curiously. “Tell me about yourself? Who did my Sammy fall for?”

I stared at him and took a large gulp of the Bloody Mary. “I was... Lucky. Smart kid in a poor part of town. I was good with numbers, made money doing things I’m not proud of. My parents could see the potential both, good and bad, so they sent me to a good college and university with what little they could save and I landed the dream job, hedge-fund manager.”

I snorted. “Even after the recession I was free to wheel and deal and get proper minted. Then the world ended in fire and death.”

“I’m sorry.” said Anthony, quite sincerely.

I almost laughed at the madness of it all. “Aliens, fucking aliens. I thought it would be depression or drugs or an economic crash? A nuclear war or just a really bad third world war? And of course with Climate Change and the ever growing resource scarcity and growing inequality as a kind of ticking clock to the apocalypse but never ever aliens...”

He looked me in the eyes. “What was it like?”

“A nightmare.” I said. I closed my eyes as the images came to the fore of my mind. “Great saucers dropping out of the sky and these things emerging like eldritch spiders. They have teeth in their arses you know? And they fly by vomiting up this bat like thing in their stomachs.”

I looked him in the eyes. “They were merciless. Any sign of resistance and they ate you alive. Women, children, even pets. They wouldn’t even chew the babies, just straight into their cavernous mouth/stomach/thing filled with acid. Digested alive.”

Anthony shook his head. “They told me they would stop harvesting worlds like that.”

“Oh, did they?” I said irritably. “Because everyone who has ever shown me kindness has either died to them, is about to die to them or gets eaten alive by them for fun.”

“I’m sorry.” said Anthony quietly. “I shall have to speak to them about this.”

“Speak to them?” I said incredulously. “I want their great Leader dead. I want him screaming for mercy, I want him begging for just one more chance at life and then I want to show him the mercy his kind has shown everyone I know, including you, I might add.”

Anthony glared at me. “I understand that you are scared and angry, that you have lost a very great deal, but I will make this VERY clear. I will not help you commit an act of murder and retribution, I will not help you start a war or a revolution. I am a man of peace.”

I spat. “A man of peace capable of possessing someone’s mind and making them flay their own skin?”

“Yes.” said Anthony with eerie calm. “I have bad days, Steve, and you better hope you never meet me on one. I will take you wherever you want to go and allow you to use whatever resources are in my power to give you, here, but I will not go with you to commit murder.”

I nodded. “Fine. I suppose the Doctor was right, pacifism is an entirely amiable position until there’s a bunch of genocidal megalomaniacs in your way.”

Anthony looked at me oddly. “You know Who?”

I snorted. “Had to do something with my money before the world ended didn’t I? It was either join a cult or find religion or become a nerd. I opted for the one marginally less likely to see me killing someone for their different beliefs.”

Anthony snorted. “Clearly still a noob then.”

I smirked.

We fell silent and I sipped my bloody merry as I massaged Lucy. She started purring and I let her off her leash. She crawled over to the cat bowl, rammed her face into the pet food and ate.

I watched her eat and felt a pang of nostalgia for though my little Sylph really had grown up, she was still my puppy. I muttered under my breath. “My life is so fucked up.”

“I could make things easier for you?” asked Anthony carefully. “I’m afraid you’re stuck with Lucy and umm... The awkwardness of keeping a grown woman as a pet. Believe me, I know that angst, I had a toy that was someone from a universe I had experienced as fiction. So much angst. Anyway she’s off travelling now, quite happy I believe, but mine never imprinted on me.”

I chuckled. “No, I know. I wouldn’t want to get rid of her anyway, I love her. Even if I do wonder what the fuck my life is now.”

“Well, you’re a hedgefund manager in a post-scarcity society.” said Anthony bluntly. “Things aren’t going to be the same but I do have a spare house you can live in for a few weeks. I’ll have Yrgritte see Lisa is properly - Shall we say ‘taken care of’?- each day and we can meet up for drinks and to walk our Sylphs. Maybe when the shock of all this has worn off a bit we can discuss Sammy.”

I looked at him and I wanted to know so much, so very much, yet I was also tired so I said. “I just want a bed, some crunchy nut, a good curry and Netflix, is that possible?”

Anthony grinned. “Oh I think we can manage that. Enjoy your stay here in Choice World, Steve.”

I nodded and sipped my drink.

*

The house was a short walk away and looked like a cottage. So twee and chocolate boxy but inside was a large three floored house with dedicated bathrooms, shower rooms and toilet rooms. I found a large room with a double bed opposite a large TV. I let Lucy off her leash again and threw myself onto the bed.

I woke up drenched in my own drool and sweat. I ached all over.

Lucy entered the room dressed in jeans and a tshirt.

I groaned, brain still warming up after the night before.

Lucy laughed and said “If I were you I would get a shower pretty darn quick. Lisa’s waiting downstairs and she nearly tried it on with me.”

I laughed and ended up having coughing fit. Eventually, wheezing, I said. “I think I’ll have that shower.”

“Yeah...” said Lucy with a smirk.

*

The shower woke me up and I found a suit to slip into. A tad formal but it was clean and it fit.

I headed downstairs and found Lisa lying stretched out on a large sofa in just a short pink skirt and crop top.

Lisa grinned when she saw me. “You look yummy.”

I stared at her. “Coming from you, that’s scary.”

Lisa chuckled. “Yrgritte is a very kind and sensitive devourer.” Then she added as an afterthought. “Carla would love her...” Her face darkened.

I took a seat on a stool beside her and said. “Lucy says you tried it on with her.”

Lisa smirked. “She’s the Farsh-nuke’s favourite, you know? I can see why. Those slender fingers...”

I looked at her pointedly. “Lisa, she’s my puppy, you understand? I don’t want you playing games with her.”

“But I’m your toy.” said Lisa irritably then she seemed to remember something and said. “That’s why I’m dressed like this actually. Apparently it’s my proper default clothing for being a toy. She said it

should help me get into the mood, that I should wean myself off being eaten."

I stared at her and sighed. "A toy, huh? And I thought my life couldn't get any weirder."

Lisa frowned then asked. "Can we fuck?"

"Pardon?" I asked.

"It doesn't have to mean anything." said Lisa awkwardly. "And anyway me and Carla were never exclusive and you and Sammy never..."

"Okay, I'm not having this conversation any more." I said. I got up to leave.

Lisa sighed.

The doorbell rang and I went to answer it.

There standing in the doorway were Amy and Carla.

Amy was dressed in a plaid flannel shirt and jeans with shoulder length ginger hair and Carla was wearing a short skirt and a tank top with her blonde hair lied back in a ponytail.

"Hi." I said uncertainly.

Amy laughed. "Yeah, versions of us were given to the Contravoxai on Anthony's wedding day so I apologise if this is eerie. I am Amy Sullivan, or at least a copy that was made and given to Anthony when he arrived in Choice World as his welcome gift-come-tour guide. I'm a Sylph, Anthony said me and your Lucy should get acquainted so you can go walking us together. This is the original Carla."

Carla waved. "Hi."

"Tamed on a one night stand after his first run in with the Contravoxai, she's a toy. Anthony hopes she can help your Lisa." explained Amy.

"Right..." I said carefully. "Word of warning, Lisa is very horny right now and, Carla, you look exactly like her recently ex-lover."

"Awesome!" said Carla excitedly. "Can we come in?"

"Oh, and by the way she comes with an off switch." said Amy as she pulled out something that looked like a TV remote and pressing a button.

Carla froze.

"She's perfectly safe like this. Her conscious mind just isn't on." said Amy cheerfully before turning Carla back on.

Carla blinked, looked to Amy then grinned at me.

“Right...” I said and stood aside to let the women in.

Carla strode past and headed into the living room to meet with Lisa.

Amy stayed with me. “Look, obviously I’m... A pet... And so kind of in a subservient position here but while I am lucid I am probably one of the most knowledgeable people about Choice World that you are going to meet so this is a memory gun and this is a quantum oscillator. The one will explain how to use the other. The Contravoxai are vile so if you want to take them down, this will help.”

“Thank you.” I said seriously.

“No problem.” said Amy cheerfully. “Just make sure you have plenty of kibble and after - Lets say 3 hours? - Come and bliss me and Lucy out so we can enjoy it.”

Amy looked to be about to go then she added. “Oh and don’t freak out if you see me and Lucy rutting when we’re blissed out. We’re Sylphs, even if we’re not lucid we’re still us. It’s only a problem if someone who is lucid gets involved.”

Then she disappeared upstairs.

I shook my head and went to find a computer, it looked and functioned reassuringly similar to computers from my world even though it was noticeably faster and more powerful. I researched the memory gun to feel certain it wouldn’t actually kill me then I pointed the barrel between my eyes and pulled the trigger. I now knew almost everything about the Quantum Oscillator and indeed I even knew what I did not know and that the reason I did not know it was because such knowledge would be too dangerous.

I practised doing cheap tricks with my quantum oscillator and had soon created a kind of pokeball to keep Lisa in. It was a modified infinite bag with a tennis ball sized hardened spherical exterior that could absorb things into it at the push of a button and beam them out at the push of a different button. I had designed the inside to be like the inside of the house and added a Hamster-esque exercise wheel just to see if I could then I got. bored and noticed that had all 56 seasons of Doctor Who on Netflix so I started binge watching my favourite Doctors.

3 hours later I went to my bedroom and found Amy and Lucy chatting over mugs of tea.

Amy smiled at me when I entered.

Lucy noticed me a moment later and said. “Amy tells me you now own a Quantum Oscillator.”

I nodded. “A very interesting device but if you don’t mind I have some Doctor Who to binge watch.”

“Don’t forget to drink your Sylph blood.” said Lucy gently.

I looked at her curiously and wondered if this was code for: ‘Please slit my neck before this woman.’

Amy removed the need for an answer to the conundrum by saying. “Oh I almost forgot, there should be a soft drink dispenser in one of the kitchens that’s been programmed to pump out artificial Sylph blood.”

I nodded. “Thanks, I’ll have to have a look into that.”

Then I approached Amy and gave her a preliminary neck massage so I could whisper. “Still sure about this?”

Lucy was giving me a dirty look, clearly annoyed that I was clitblocking her. “Is there anything you particularly need, Steven?”

Amy grinned and whispered “Yes, do it. I’m ready.”

I circled round to Lucy and whispered. “Trust me, you’ll get what you want.”

Lucy blissed out in just a few minutes.

Amy watched the whole thing with voyeuristic fascination and Lucy was certainly aware of this but seemed okay with it.

Amy herself took a little longer to bliss out owing to my lack of experience with her but it didn’t take tooo long so I left the blissed out puppies to get better acquainted while I routed out the artificial Sylph blood. I decided to binge watch Doctor Who somewhere else to give them privacy.

Six hours later there came a ring on the doorbell and I answered it. A short powerful looking woman with flame red hair was holding a large bag between her clasped hands.

“Ah, Steven, we meet at last.” She said cheerfully. “Allow me to introduce myself, I am Yrgritte and you... Are very welcome to join my household in any subservient capacity you may wish. I could use a new footstool.”

I swallowed nervously. “Umm...”

Yrgritte held up the carrier bag. “One Chicken Tikka Masala with Pilau Rice, Saag Aloo, Naan Bread, chips and a large box of Kelloggs Crunchy Nut. As you wanted.”

“Thank you.” I said with a large appreciative grin as I took the bag. “But you aren’t just here to delivery my curry are you?”

Yrgritte shook her head and chuckled. “I am here for my toy and my takeaway.”

I looked blankly at her until I realised what she meant. “So you really eat her?”

Yrgritte shrugged. “I’m a Charicthy, darling, and Humans are such beastly creatures when it comes to my kind. Kind of nice to have them on the menu for a change and she is so very sweet about it. You know she even insists I take her internal organs after she’s recovered on the understanding that she’ll swiftly replace them? Of course, Anthony thinks the entire thing is simply ghastly but he never got the hang of the idea that consent makes something okay.”

I nodded and l headed into the downstairs living room to find Lisa and Carla naked in a position that I would never even have thought possible before.

I blinked and said. “You may need to wash her before you eat her.”

Yrgritte nodded then said loudly. “Girls, I need you!”

The – Activity - Continued for a moment more then they sheepishly stood before Yrgritte.

“Shower, now.” ordered Yrgritte and they hurried off.

Then Yrgritte turned to me and said. “Don’t worry about them, I know my way around girls, you just enjoy your curry, dear, and remember my door is always open to a submissive youngster.”

I nodded then decided to eat my curry before Doctor Who.

*

I slept in a bed that night and had sleep that was strangely untroubled. My world had collapsed over night in alien madness but my nightmares of very real events blurred with memories of binge watching Doctor Who such that I didn’t feel afraid. There was screaming, there was suffering but through it all was hope, hope represented by a strange man in an odd suit saying. “No More”

I woke to find Amy and Lucy either side of me, both thankfully fully dressed.

Lucy said. “Amy explained about yesterday so I just wanted to say thank you. I was right to trust you.”

“Right...” I said.

“I was thinking that Lucy could join me over at Anthony’s? I mean I can’t stay away long, he’ll miss me but I... Well I like her.” said Amy awkwardly.

Lucy blushed and asked “You won’t be lonely, will you? You have been through a lot.”

“Go.” I said with a smirk. “I have TV and I have food. Be happy.”

And that’s how the week passed.

The Sylphs blissed out at mine and Anthony’s on alternate days and Lisa explored the full value of the original Carla before Yrgritte explored the various ways in which to enjoy Lisa’s flesh and I - I binge watched TV series on netflix and ate curries everyday. I mean I’m a wereshark, I can heal fully from a single beating heart and I have three of them, fat does not scare me any more and it’s a post-scarcity society where money and regulated capitalism exists as a kind of risk free incentive system to encourage people to follow their dreams and let a stable popular culture develop. If I wanted this to be my life until the end of time, I could.

Do you maybe see the flaw in the logic there? The fly in the proverbial oyster?

I was a smart kid from a rough part of town and I lost good friends even before the aliens came, it’s how I remained so relatively calm. Then I got eaten alive, fell hopelessly in love and became a vampire to stave off the insanity of being a wereshark. I became good friends with people who like to be eaten

for kicks and aliens who liked to eat people, oh and I now had a pet woman and my saviour's wife looked at me like I was a slab of meat just waiting to be devoured.

How the fuck do you return to normality after that? I didn't even have a job any more, didn't have a government to hate, bigots to complain about or poor people to distance myself from. I mean Choice World wasn't perfect what with the vampires and wandering elder gods and Logicios vanishing people but they all were only allowed to operate because their 'victims' utterly consented.

There were problems that in some sense made the problems of my world seem small. The Great Unending Septagonoid War for the safety of the multiverse. The Bam-Kursh's imperial conquest of universes into joining the United Civilisations of the Multiverse, the apparently civilised attempt at protecting the multiverse without recourse to the elder gods or their followers. The bigotry and sadism of the Logicios, the Great Farsh-nuke's massive army of superpowered supernerds who did by and large actually keep the multiverse safe but were all in all complete dicks about it.

Except that in my world the anger and fear was impotent and you could do nothing about it so instead it reminded you that life was worth living because it was all so fleeting and horrible for so many that you enjoyed what small wonders you could and were thankful.

Here I lived without fear, I was utterly protected, utterly free to live my life however I wished and if I got angry about the state of the multiverse I could become a Logicio or an Architect of Chaos, even sign up to be a host for a dislocated eldergod who would know how to figh,t or I could just find a Seghat or buy one or find someone who was willing to let me turn them into one and then go off having adventures by myself without training or backup. I could even slowly build myself a multiverse travelling ship that wasn't powered by a Sylph enlightened to the point of transcending into being logic and energy.

I had no strings to hold me down, no chains to bind me, I could leave the Platonic Cave and I had absolutely no fucking clue what to do with that infinite potential before me. Except for the knowledge that as a former hedge-fund manager I was going to make damn certain I did not waste the potential presented to me.

I discussed this with Anthony when we went walking our Sylphs together. Lucy and Amy were clearly quite close by now as even blissed out, walking as pups on all fours at the end of our leashes, they stuck close by each other and indeed I did accidentally find myself observing some quite canine rutting once or twice.

Anthony suggested I consider joining a vampire guild or finding a suitable person to imprint on and be a pet sylph to. He said that clearly my burdens were how I preferred to be directed in life and that my wereshark bloodlust and its mastery was one burden that both genuinely needed addressing and might be taken advantage of to provide direction.

Well after the sack of my world I was not about to become some monstrous vampire. Besides, it was too easy as I had in my possession a woman who regarded herself as my pet and happily let me drink from her and a woman who regarded herself as my toy and was driven to near sexual levels of excitement and joy by the thought and practise of being eaten alive. If you're going to pick a goal to strive for pick Everest over a quiet drink at the pub.

So I approached Yrgritte when she was waiting for Carla and Lisa to finish showering so she could take

them with her to Chez Jago.

“You have quite the way with women?” I said by way of an opener.

Yrgritte smiled. “Not women, just the young Humans. In the ocean you have to be tough to survive, you have to be a little cold and ruthless inside. You Humans are too pampered, you want and expect a guiding hand, even if that hand is guiding you into a toy box or a stew.”

I had to laugh at that. “Yes, well, I think we have better survivability rates.”

“That’s because your opposable thumbs make you better at killing.” said Yrgritte bluntly.

I snorted and fell silent. How the fuck do you ask to be someone’s pet? Excuse me Mrs Terrifying, you seem like a very dominating personality, care to walk me on a leash and feed me some pedigree chum?

I coughed, trying to encourage myself to speak but the words wouldn’t come. What words could come?

“Well, you make Lisa very happy.” I managed at last.

“Thank you.” said Yrgritte graciously. “Tonight we’re having a stew with mashed potatoes. You’re welcome to join us, as either guest or entree.”

“Yes.” I said with enthusiasm, which caused Yrgritte to look at me curiously and me to add hurriedly. “Being a guest would be just fine.”

Yrgritte grinned. “So you will come into my parlor? Interesting...”

At that moment Lisa and Carla exited and Yrgritte handed them a bag each of clothes to put on.

“Steven will be joining us.” said Yrgritte. “I trust that won’t be a problem, Lisa?”

Lisa smirked. “Never.”

“Good.” said Yrgritte.

Carla studied me with obvious glee before dressing. “I have a feeling Lisa’s not the only one for the pot tonight.”

I swallowed.

Lisa chuckled and pulled on her clothes.

Yrgritte patted the small of my back and said. “He’ll live, don’t worry.

Then we walked over to her house and Carla laid the table as Yrgritte led Lisa into the kitchen.

I found Anthony reading something called The Farscape Collective as the blissed out forms of Lucy and Amy rutted quietly on a Sylph bed in a corner of the room. He was drinking some brown liquid from a glass and seemed deep into his reading. I also noticed three statues standing in an alcove. I had

skipped over them before because I normally don't give two shits about interior design but seeing them in the same room as Amy and Lucy made me realise. One of the blonde women on the plinth was the spit of Lucy and the ginger on the opposite side was the spit of Amy.

"Interesting statues." I said.

"Yes." said Anthony without looking up from his book. "The original Amy and Lucy and, in the center my first toy, Candi."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because Candi likes it and the others are safer that way." said Anthony dismissively. "Lisa and Carla are allowed to be played with because I can trust them to be obedient. As for the Amy blissed out on the floor? Well... She lacks an off switch."

"What happened?" I asked.

"That is not a question to be answered today." said Anthony with a peculiar air of finality. "Now, enjoy your food."

I turned as the smell reached my nose and exclaimed. "That smells amazing."

"Thank you." said Lisa sweetly as Yrgritte brought a vast pot of stew into the room on a trolley.

Lisa's head and shoulders stuck out from the pot and she looked utterly ecstatic.

"Hush." said Yrgritte tersely. "No talking at the dinner table."

Yrgritte pulled a rather large fork and knife from the trolley and stabbed into Lisa's flesh below the waterline, a moment later a gobbet of meat rose out of the stew at the end of the fork. Yrgritte nibbled at it then reached it across the table so Carla could sample it. "Think she's ready?"

Carla nodded and licked her lips as she swallowed the gobbet.

Yrgritte disappeared back into the kitchen and I approached Lisa, being careful not to get hurt by the steam coming off the stew. "Hey, are you okay?"

Lisa nodded then whispered. "I'm only sorry I can't sample me."

Yrgritte returned with three plates filled with mashed potato, the potato had been sculpted so there was a hollow for the stewed meat and veg to sit in.

Yrgritte glared at me and said. "Unless you want to join her, keep away from the meat."

I hurriedly backed off and watched in horrified fascination as Yrgritte carved meat from Lisa and placed it on our plates.

Finally Yrgritte reached a gloved hand into the stew, pulled out a still pulsing organ and proceeded to grate it as a garnish over our plates before tossing it back in the stew.

I stared at my plate of food and tentatively selected a gobbet of stewed meat, saw that it was thoroughly covered with mashed potato and ate it. It tasted fantastic and I must not have been able to hide the surprised smile on my face because Lisa looked at me meaningfully and smiled.

It is a matter of some personal shame as far as I am concerned that I cleaned my plate.

Then Yrgritte leaned over to me and whispered in my ear. “We both know you didn’t come here to eat your friend.”

“No.” I said awkwardly “That’s quite true.”

“I understand that it must be difficult for you to admit.” said Yrgritte gently. “So I won’t make you. Merely say no or stop if what I do displeases you.”

And that’s when she started massaging my back.

“Carla.” commanded Yrgritte loudly. “Do be a dear and roll the trolley into the pantry. I’ll finish with Lisa later. Then climb into the toybox, there’s a good girl.”

Carla set about her task swiftly and I watched as Lisa left the room. She saw though, saw Yrgritte’s hands working on my neck and she had to keep herself from laughing.

I let Yrgritte work, gave myself fully under her command and her instruction was as simple as it was perverse: Give into the impulses, let the beast free.

*

I woke up naked in a cage barely big enough to sit up in. There was a half eaten bowl of kibble to my right and I had clearly slept with my head in my waterbowl but thankfully spilled enough to avoid drowning. Then again, I am a wereshark, maybe I did drown but kept healing until it was all gone? It doesn’t really matter.

I groaned.

A familiar voice asked. “Has he woken?”

Then a pair of legs approached my cage and I said. “Excuse me, would someone kindly explain what the fuck is going on?”

“Yeah.” said a different familiar voice. “Get Yrgritte.”

Then I heard footsteps and running.

The bars of my cage were rattled and the different familiar voice said. “So, you’re a pet now, huh? Well that makes things a bit complicated.”

Then more footsteps.

A loud voice that I knew incredibly well said. “Get back, he needs space, he’ll be in shock.”

Footsteps again.

The door to my cage was opened and a firm hand gripped my neck and secured something there. “Steve, follow my lead, I will explain everything.”

The hand went away and I felt myself pulled so I crawled in the direction of the pulling.

“How much do you remember of last night?” asked the voice.

“Well, I remember I was going to ask you something then you invited me to dinner and I...” I trailed off and sighed “I ate Lisa. I ate Lisa and I liked it.”

“And?”

“And what?” I asked.

“What do you remember after that?”

I frowned as I struggled to remember. “You whispered something to me and I liked it, you started massaging me...”

I shot to my feet suddenly as realization dawned, I glared at Yrgritte. “You drugged me.”

I saw now that Lucy and Amy were also in the room, fully dressed and looking nervously at me.

“No.” said Yrgritte calmly.

“Then how?” I asked.

Lucy shrugged. “Sylph blood.”

I looked to her.

Lucy explained. “It keeps you sane the way it keeps me and Lisa and the others sane, the third way cancels out the first, the submissiveness cancels out the desire to dominate. You’ve not imprinted on anyone but that doesn’t mean you’re not going to respond to the same stimuli, that you’re not going to bliss out.”

“Oh...” I said. I felt rather foolish.

Yrgritte asked. “What were you going to ask me?”

“If you would drug me.” I said with a laugh.

“Yes.” Yrgritte said sweetly. “But for now get dressed and take your girls home. I will come for you.”

I did not say no.

*

Lisa and Carla naturally spent the day enjoying each other. Even Lucy and Amy spent the day in each other's company but I felt alone. I tried to ignore it. Tried to watch Netflix, to experiment with the Quantum Oscillator and memory gun but I just couldn't shake the feeling like part of my soul was missing.

Then Yrgritte came for me.

It was much like last time, only Yrgritte had actually removed Lisa's arms and legs before putting her in the stew. She had put them in the temporal freezer so that she could remove Lisa's arms and legs again and deep fry them all at once. Lisa's ribs were removed to be barbecued and her lungs, kidneys and liver pureed with herbs and spices to make sausages. This approach was not as involved and painful as Lisa usually liked so Yrgritte sliced off one of her ears and that seemed to satisfy the masochistic girl.

I do not feel ashamed for liking the deep fry for two important reasons: 1. It tasted fantastic and unlike a regular deep fry the portion sizes were hilariously huge. 2. Deep fried fast food chains are famously atrocious when it comes to the breeding, rearing and slaughtering of their meat animals. True, this was a post-scarcity society where deep fry without the torture was possible but compared to all the deep fry I had eaten in the past I felt reasonably confident that this was by far the most ethically sourced as indeed I could be certain of seeing the meat donor in full health tomorrow.

Then Carla was put back in her toybox and Yrgritte returned with a small engagement ring box. She went down on one knee and opened the box to reveal a small white pill that looked not unlike a mint imperial "Will you, Steven Banks, please consent to be my lawfully recognised pet Sylph?"

I laughed and lifted the pill then paused with it before my lips. "This is legally recognised?"

Yrgritte nodded and got to her feet again. "Helps the elder gods and their followers know you're taken. Legally speaking you will be treated as sapient pet under my and my husband's charge. You'll still have your Human rights, you'll just have a whole load of extra Sylph rights intended to protect you since you'll be so easily exploitable."

I glared at her. "Nobody mentioned this?"

Yrgritte snorted. "Be thankful you're just my pet. The toys quite literally surrender their rights and become legal property, hence how they can be bought and sold."

I stared at her for a long moment then shrugged and swallowed it. I looked her in the eyes and said. "Yrgritte, I hereby give my consent to be your lawfully recognised pet Sylph."

And then I felt weird.

I looked at Yrgritte and saw the mad dominating woman I considered an easy and experienced pick for mistress if I was to be a pet but I was also now seeing – No. - feeling, Yrgritte, my protector, my commander, my mistress, my God. Then she stroked me.

It was like fireworks going off as electrochemical signals rushed through my body to let me know that this was a fucking fantastic sensation.

“Oh!” I said enthusiastically. “That felt good.”

Yrgritte grinned and tickled me under my chin.

I found myself marvelling at her as I felt a sudden overriding love for her.

“Follow me, there’s a good boy.” She said as she took me by the hand.

*

I woke up naked in the cage again but this time I was fully aware of what was going on and had showered and dressed by the time Yrgritte arrived to check up on me.

“So how do you feel?” she asked.

I grinned and said. “It’s hard to describe accurately but fucking fantastic will suffice.”

Yrgritte grinned and cleared the hair from my face. “I know you’re my pet and I accept full responsibility for you in that regard but I also know that you only said yes because you need to be someone’s pet to counteract the wereshark madness so don’t feel like you owe me anything.”

I nodded. “Thank you.”

She stroked the hair at the back of my head and I could see her weighing up her options. I was now hers in a most profound way and she was clearly tempted by the idea of reducing me to pup in her arms again but instead she tickled my chin and said. “Go, be with your girls. Be a Human again.”

So I did.

The wereshark blood gave me some measure of protection from the obedience of a Sylph but when your Master or Mistress offers such a command while priming you with the gestures of friendly control, it is very hard not to do as they ask. Especially when that is what you’d really rather like to do anyway.

Lisa was noticeably interested in my new state as pet and rather implored me to join her and Carla in a threesome but I politely refused. I knew where my future lay now.

I studied up about Seghats and Quantum Oscillators. To the point where Lucy had to physically jostle me so I’d notice when she came to say goodbye as she and Amy went over to Anthony’s to bliss out.

It was odd looking at my dear pet and knowing exactly how she felt when my massaging caused her to become a less sapient creature of instinct. It made me love her more in a way since the doubts at the back of my mind vanished and I understood why this was a lifestyle she wished to indulge in. To her it must be like moving to heaven from hell.

Lucy’s life had been war, the worst and highest stakes kind of war. The original Lucy had grown up

fighting robots, spent an age walking the parallel Earths helping to lead the fightback on what would become the United Civilisations of the Multiverse, been burned alive by the Great Farsh-nuke and all so she would be physically and mentally able to command every battlefield in the war against the Septagonoids. A woman who had suffered her entire life and then turned into a weapon by one horrible man. Then she sacrificed herself to the Contravoxai for a different better man and endured being eaten alive day in, day out, for over a hundred years.

Now her life was friendship, puppy love and fucking with another Sylph, who did not share her scars, and the euphoric surrender of pethood to a kind owner.

I envied her the simple joy and happiness this life seemed to bring her but of course that's why all broken men keep naive optimists about them. They are a lighthouse in dark times, letting even the most jaded and cynical of people understand that there was truly something wrong.

You see I was safe now. I was cured. I had a kind of new family again. I even had the reassurance that my race was not dead. Humanity persists across the multiverse no matter what the Contravoxai do. My culture and civilisation lived on and I could start again. Start afresh. Become a citizen of Choice World. A refugee from alien lands come to make the world a brighter place.

Except that in Choice World, in the multiverse, one man really could make a difference and I had unfinished business to attend to so I started planning something, something big but before I acted on this plan I wanted to talk to Anthony, I wanted to get some answers.

*

"Does it feel weird?" asked Anthony when we began walking our Sylphs that weekend. "Knowing that as part owner I could just as easily be walking you?"

I laughed and admired the beauty of Choice World then said. "Anthony, if you want to walk me you have only to bliss me out but I am afraid I have long since passed the merely weird."

"Fair point." said Anthony with a smile. "Well, for what it's worth, I'm glad you decided to become mine and Yrgritte's pet. You make her very happy and it seems Sammy went to a lot of effort to get you to me. It only feels right to have you under my care and welcome you into the family. Plus it makes me feel less of a sexist bigot."

I snorted and said. "I have drunk the freshly spilled blood of a woman I keep as a pet and eaten the flesh of another I call friend. I think I rather trump you on the pissing off feminists front."

Anthony chuckled. "You actually ate Lisa, eh? Well I suppose it was only a matter of time. That girl's the chosen plaything of the Bam-Kursh, you know even the toy you can buy in shops likes to have her head cut off and her internal organs dissected?"

"You ever entertain that whimsy of hers?" I asked curiously.

"No." said Anthony pointedly "However Yrgritte will insist that we spend at least one day a month as sharks and on those occasions the toys are asked to strap vat grown steaks to their backs and frolic at the surface waiting for us to strike and pull them under. Lisa seems to take particular enjoyment so I have noticed Yrgritte will often experiment with the most savage of attacks against her."

I couldn't help but laugh at that then said. "We're going to hell aren't we?"

"Good thing we're immortal then..." said Anthony with a wry smile before he added more seriously. "They like it, Steven. It utterly baffles me and causes me no end of worry but they like it and gods help me but I think I like that they like it too."

"Yeah..." I said as I watched Lucy pause to sniff a turd in the road that I prayed had been made by a dog. "I've noticed that too. It feels wrong in my bones but they look so happy, how can you not find it adorable?"

Anthony chuckled.

I saw Amy try to take advantage of Lucy's distractedness and try to take her from behind. Lucy turned at this and started trying to kiss Amy. At this point Amy kissed Lucy then strode on, leaving Lucy to bound after her. The absurd display of puppy love reminded me of my purpose here today so I asked. "What can you tell me of Sammy?"

Anthony thought for a moment then asked. "Do you know how me and Yrgritte met?"

I shook my head.

"Well, I was approached by a man. He called himself the Slick, I could swear he had stepped right out of my dreams. He said he founded Choice World, that he very carefully controlled the immigration so that there would be plenty of willing Submissives for passing Vampires, Elder Gods and Logicios to take advantage of. This whole place was intended as a honey pot to attract the great and powerful of the multiverse and convince them to settle down." explained Anthony carefully. "He explained in essence that Choice World was not intended as a utopia for its citizens. It was intended as an ark for the great and the powerful."

"An Ark? As in Noah? Why?" I asked.

"Because, as he explained it: If and, god willing, when the Great Septagonoid War is over and the Logicios are given sufficient a bloody nose to stop being so sadistic, sexist and amoral and the Bam-Kursh's attempt at playing Napoleon is quashed and all the Lucys have been quietly rounded up and retired, someone, something, is going to have to rebuild multiversal civilisation." said Anthony.

I nodded thoughtfully. "So this is like the Library of Alexandria, a record of civilisation from before the world erupted in war?"

"No." said Anthony with as frown. "It's more like the Vatican, a strange little nation state with pretensions to godlike power whose job is to keep civilisation going after the great empires fall by providing the necessary education the leaders of the new world will need to not completely fuck it up and keep it vaguely moving in the right direction."

"Interesting." I said dismissively. "But what does this have to do with Sammy, or indeed Yrgritte?"

Anthony smiled apologetically then explained. "This man could do all this and keep control because he had a power that let him be practically omnipotent and omniscient but - like Rome - the larger his little

empire got, the harder it became to keep track of. So he had been looking for a junior partner to share the burden with. Someone who could make the hard choices and would do whatever it took to achieve the goals set to him and someone who - No matter how often he crossed the line. - would still try to be moral."

"He chose you?" I said.

"Indeed." said Anthony as he looked at his left hand as if remembering some long since faded scar. "I would be able to control the very subatomic particles and logic of my being. I am what is technically known as a Liquidator because I can alter myself to become the four states of matter at will and I can become so at one with the matter of something that I can phase through it. I can make clones of myself at a whim, absorb entire planets into myself and, yes, even possess and absorb people's minds so I can replicate them too."

"Wow!" I said, impressed. "Suddenly Superman looks pretty darn pedestrian."

Anthony nodded "With great power comes great responsibility and I had one hell of a responsibility to consider. I would be Sheriff of Choice World. The protector of the core universes. Except I'm a smart man with a self loathing problem, I needed convincing and how do you pay a man to accept that much responsibility when he is living in a utopia? I had a small harem of toys around me, I was already as immortal as you and I had a Seghat that I knew how to use. I did not need anything he could give me. So he offered to pay me with my heart's greatest desire. He could scan my soul and mind for the woman who would be perfect for me and provide me with her location."

"And that was Yrgritte?" I said.

"No..." said Anthony with a laugh. "I wrote the coordinates down wrong. Ended up turning up at this Charicthy's place, a great cyborg shark. And I was thinking well this is wrong, this can't be. Only, when you move to Choice World its inhabitants are scanned as matches for you and things are narrowed down to a point where the prospective personalities can have their minds simulated by artificial intelligence and volunteers are asked for. The chosen volunteer mind is then incarnated from a scan taken when the person first immigrated to Choice World so this fresh copy might be given as a welcome gift to the new citizen of Choice World. This Charicthy had received a copy of me as a welcome gift."

I chuckled at that. "So you asked your future wife out because a copy of you was given to her as a pet?"

Anthony nodded. "He was quite charming about the whole thing really, got himself scooped up by a down on his luck Logicio and let Yrgritte use his becoming a Sylph to allow her to become a wereshark without the madness or submissiveness. I check on him every now and again. He seems very happy. Travelling the multiverse writing wrongs with his Master. I gather it's a very loving relationship, and as for me and Yrgritte? Well she loves me for the monstrous predator I have always feared I am or could be."

"That's very sweet, in a weird fucked up sort of way." I said with a smile.

Anthony blushed. "Of course when it came time for our wedding the Slick decided to clear up the confusion and while he was very happy for us he brought along my actual payment as a wedding gift.

She thought she was his plus one and was rather confused as to why this strange man had brought her along to this wedding."

"That was Sammy?" I asked.

Anthony nodded. "My perfect woman, perfect Human woman anyway, was a girl who had a happy childhood, even enjoyed her time at school, college and university and even landed a good job and yet, despite everything going so very well for her and her being so very happy with her life, the Slick assured me that she would very much like it if I were to walk up her and make her mine and he was right. He was so right that she had my Seghat clone her so her clone might climb onto the great Leader's dinner plate, become that me's pet Sylph and wereshark and be eaten alive by the great Leader along with that me."

"So that's how -?"

"That's how the woman who saved your life came to be in such a position." said Anthony with a nod. "I am rather afraid I was worried for her so I found Carla that first night I had convinced her to be my toy, the night after I had first encountered and been eaten by the Contravoxai, I cloned her and explained the situation to the clone so she climbed up onto the great Leader's dinnerplate as well. That was when the Bam-Kursh decided to send one of her still human Lisa's up onto the stage."

"And Amy?" I asked, out of curiosity.

Anthony smiled at the memory. "Yrgritte revealed on our honeymoon that she had tracked down the original Amy and she intended for her to be our new toy so that, in her words, I would not be left wondering about the girl who had been chosen as my welcome gift. Amy was utterly on board with this amazingly and even consented when Yrgritte suggested we consecrate the sanctity and certainty of our marriage with a threesome. I did try to disagree. Then in the morning when Amy was skimming through the papers that would make her our legal property Yrgritte pulled Sammy out of storage so they could get acquainted and Sammy somehow talked Amy into having herself cloned so the clone could join Me, Sammy, Lucy, Lisa and Carla on the great Leader's dinner plate."

I chuckled. "Sounds like a great, if ridiculous, wedding."

Anthony chuckled himself. "Yes, for our honeymoon retreat she'd rented out a gorgeous desert island and had the local vampires recruit a small army's worth of gorgeous women who were willing to fill out the necessary legal paperwork and get the necessary injections such that they would all be our toys and therefore functionally immortal. The women were instructed to get drunk, have sex and generally have as much fun as possible before enjoying the beautiful blue waters in which me and Yrgritte hunted. It was a kind of game, competing to see who could breach the highest and drag the most toys down to our chalet in a cave deep under water. We tried to let the survivors of our little game go but they were very resistant to the idea so into the packing crates they went."

"What happened to them?" I asked.

"Oh, I gave about half of them away to various friends, organisations and charity auctions over the years. Always with their permission, of course." said Anthony casually. "I think most of them are still on display somewhere, awaiting the day I need them but Yrgritte still has a few that she regularly uses for breaching practise. You'd have to ask her."

I nodded. “Fair enough.”

The conversation dried up and Anthony said. “The girls are getting tired I think we should back, why don’t you come to mine? Yrgritte can bliss you out and you can enjoy the dubious delights of your friend’s flesh again.”

I snorted and followed Anthony’s suggestion.

We walked back in relative silence but there was one question hanging between us. How could it not? Things had been so happy for Anthony back in the day, this Yrgritte had clearly allowed him to enjoy things he would never otherwise have allowed himself to enjoy and all had seemed perfectly okay with this. So what changed? What made the man who casually accepted two women as gifts on his wedding day and hunted women as sport on his honeymoon suddenly decide to spend his days quietly reading and walking his Sylphs while the majority of his toys were left frozen, their minds turned off?

Lisa today was stuffed with onions and herbs then roasted before being presented to the table like a Christmass turkey and carved up for the dinner plate. Again this proved a bit pedestrian for Lisa’s liking and when slicing off her ears and pan frying them didn’t satisfy her Yrgitte pulled out her eyes and ate them like Brussels sprouts. This seemed to settle Lisa’s mind to rest that she was being suitably taken advantage of so the eating was allowed to begin.

However Yrgritte was so rattled by Lisa’s obstinacy with regards to her cooking that she started stroking and massaging me before I had even taken a single bite and I somewhat regrettably blissed out before I could.

*

I woke the next day naked besides Yrgritte as she watched a sharkploitation film.

Seeing that I was awake Yrgritte hurriedly turned the volume down on the TV. “Sorry, did I wake you?”

I shrugged.

Yrgritte stroked my cheek idly and said. “Sorry about last night. I blissed you out too early, didn’t I? No did dins.”

I smirked. “Well I was rather interested how someone roasted alive tastes now that you mention it but it is probably a good idea that I stop with the cannibalism.”

Yrgritte squeezed me and said. “There’s some cold in the fridge if you’re still interested, I just got so angry with her. My Lisa’s been properly tamed by the Bam-Kursh, this one is... Very demanding and I just can’t make her happy any more. She needs a Contravoxai.”

I nodded and nuzzled Yrgritte. “I have been thinking about that actually...”

“Well don’t hold back on my account.” said Yrgritte gently. “If you’ve got any ideas about how to help her, act on them.”

“Will you miss me?” I asked seriously.

She smiled sadly. “Oh, Steve, I barely know you and I’ve got more than enough toys to keep me busy, if his royal highness would let me that is. Now go on, I’ve kept you long enough, your clothes are in the shower room.”

*

I stepped out of the shower in my suit and found Anthony talking with Yrgritte.

“Come on, boy.” He said. “I think I owe you an explanation.”

He led me down long corridors to a hidden door locked with 7 different keys.

Anthony placed his hand against the locks, arranged like the points on a septagon, then there was a click as the door sprang open.

I strode in and saw arranged along the left and right of the hallway a series of statues. There was one of Anthony, one of some gruff guy with a beard, one of some short blonde woman with spectacles and then one of Sammy.

“This is where I keep her.” explained Anthony gravely. “I call it my hall of heroes. To the casual observer it will just look like a fancy display of the more recent Bam-Kursh toys.”

“You’re a toy?” I asked incredulously.

“The Bam-Kursh cloned me before I joined Choice World when I had so little left to live for... And she’s good.” said Anthony simply.

I nodded, satisfied and went to examine Sammy. “This is really her?” I asked.

Anthony seemed to falter then said. “Sammy... she died. She died, Steven.”

“How?” I asked.

“Septagonoid logical void gun. Not even the elder gods can survive a direct hit from one of them.” said Anthony.

He stared at the statue of Sammy and stroked her cheek, it gave beneath his fingers like real flesh. “I always wondered why the Doctor travels alone. I suppose I watched too much of the Arrow. I thought fighting crime could be a team effort, despite how much more powerful I am compared to everybody else, and bless her she was so keen, always running into danger by my side and most of the time she was fine. I mean I’ve had recover her body parts from the bottom of the ocean and deep space before but she could always be pieced back together and allowed to heal.”

“I’m sorry.” I said awkwardly. “But I have to ask, what was a Septagonoid doing here?”

“Living.” He said sadly. “Just living. Choice World is the one place in the entire multiverse where

Septagonoids are allowed to be people, just so long as they keep the whole trying to end the multiverse hobby on the backburner. It's why it's so safe, even the great enemies of the multiverse respect Choice World as a safe haven of peace and tranquillity."

"Then what happened?" I asked.

"We were taking out an arms dealer who was kidnapping citizens off the street to turn them into biomechanical weapons. We needed the best weapon to counter it, we needed a Septagonoid. I was able to bring one round and convince it to work with us. Then Frederick tried his luck, nothing would please the sick fuck more than turning the great scourge of the multiverse into his little toy but the Septagonoid wasn't having it and things got heated so she lashed out and Frederick ducked. The bolt vaporised Sammy's heart, brain and soul." explained Anthony.

He turned to me, tears in his eyes. "I tried to save her. I always back up every girl's memories before we go out on a trip anyway, just in case, and I always kept a spare of Sammy on the off chance so I was able to copy the spare's soul and fuse it with what was left of her body. In time she healed and I gave her the latest set of memories. She looked me in the eyes and was so fucking cheery, ready to go out to battle again. All 'Oh well, my soul was vaporised and I'm a Frankenstein's monster of soul, memories and flesh but still I live so no harm done, eh?' and I just couldn't take it. I had saved her yet I also knew I'd lost her and I didn't want to lose her ever again."

"So here she stands in perpetuity." I said quietly.

He nodded.

"And the copy?" I asked.

"In the toy box." He said "Never to be woken. I just can't do it. I failed her. She was the most beautiful perfect woman and I am the reason that she's dead. If I'd only been smarter, if I'd only been quicker..."

"Could I have a moment alone, to pay my respects?" I asked.

"Of course." He said then he ran outside the hall and closed the door, I could hear him sobbing outside.

I removed my Quantum Oscillator from my jacket pocket and turned Sammy's mind on.

"Hello." She said cheerily "Who are you?"

"Remember Anthony's wedding and the Contravoxai?" I asked.

"How could I forget?" She said brightly. "That was the day my life finally had meaning. And the Contravoxai? Yes, I left a copy of myself with them, which would make you that me's bit of rough. I saved your life, didn't I?"

"How did you know?" I asked before I added awkwardly. "And me and Sammy aren't really... Umm..."

She laughed and kissed me on the cheek. "Don't fret. You're exactly my type. She just probably hasn't told you because on top of being submissive old me she's also a Sylph. Now, why are you here?"

“To return the favour, save your life.” I said gravely.

Sammy shrugged. “I don’t feel very dead.”

“That’s not what your owner thinks?” I said pointedly.

Sammy rolled her eyes and said. “Blessed little idiot. By the time I was given to him he’d faced dying of a terminal illness, turning evil, losing his mind and being eaten alive but if I get caught in one little Septagonoid blast suddenly I must be hidden from view and kept safely switched off until the end of days lest I get vaporised again. He’s got a spare anyway, wonder how that poor girl feels. The one time she might be expected a chance to be played with and still I’m hogging the limelight, and all because I was here first.”

I smirked and bit my lip.

“What is it?” She asked.

“Just thinking about how much I miss you, is all...” I said.

“But I’m not - Oh! You mean the other me? The one back on the Contravoxai ship?” she said with a smile.

“There’s a Contravoxai by the name of David, claims to love her. I can’t compete with a man who can eat her alive, she really loves that.” I said awkwardly.

Sammy laughed and hugged me. “Oh, you dear sweet naive fool, this isn’t a competition. This David fellow can eat her body and you can own her heart and soul. You’ve just got to have the confidence to ask for it, that’s all Anthony did with me.”

I nodded. “Very wise.” Then I said. “Come with me.”

Sammy hopped off her little plinth and said, “Well, lead on, my brave prince charming.”

I chuckled and led the way outside.

Anthony was sobbing into a sodden handkerchief and blowing his nose every few minutes.

“Anthony, we need a word.” I said gently.

Anthony and turned to look at me then jumped in fright. “Sammy!? Oh my poor girl!?”

Sammy smiled sadly. “I’m fine, Anthony.”

“Your soul was vaporised!” cried Anthony incredulously.

“And she’s better now, thanks to you.” I said pointedly. “I know you’re scared and I understand exactly how you feel. My Sammy gets eaten alive for kicks. No one should have to look at their lovers internal organs, least of all on a regular basis, but it is the life she chose and it is the life she loves. How do you

think Yrgritte feels knowing you're going off to battle criminals everyday, criminals who could kill you?"

"That's different?" said Anthony indignantly.

"How?" I asked bluntly.

"Because I am a survivor and Yrgritte can trust that I will do whatever it takes to return home." said Anthony firmly.

"And you don't trust me to do the same?" asked Sammy seriously.

"No." said Anthony angrily. "I'm sorry but nothing about you has ever led me to believe you wouldn't walk willingly into death's welcoming arms."

Sammy bit her lip. "Okay, I suppose he's kind of got a point there."

Anthony nodded. "See, she admits it."

I turned to Sammy and looked her in the eyes. "Sammy, you don't know me but I know you. I know you very well and I have a message I want you to deliver to me the next time you see me."

"What sort of message?" asked Sammy curiously.

I kissed her lightly on the lips, she kissed back so I snogged her passionately then broke off.

"Good message." said Sammy, clearly a tad dazed by the experience.

I turned to Anthony and said. "I swear to you if you get this Bam-Kursh to turn a version of me into a toy I will never ever abandon Sammy or let her come to unwanted harm ever again."

"Are you serious?" asked Anthony uncertainly.

I looked him in the eyes and said. "You said you would take me somewhere? Well I am going back to the Contravoxai to be with my Sammy and save what is left of my people. If riding back into hell isn't commitment then I don't know what is."

Anthony nodded. "I believe you and I shall see what I can do to help you. I can't do anything big. I'm not going to help you harm anyone but there may be some things I can give you."

I nodded. "Thank you. One last thing though, make sure Amy and Lucy, your toys I mean, make sure they are played with as well. For too long you have let your doubt and fear imprison your friends."

"What?" asked Sammy incredulously. "He's not even let Amy and Lucy free? Wow!"

"Alright, clearly I have to make amends for a lot of things but I need time, time to think and find things out." said Anthony "Will you please just let me take you to Yrgritte?"

Sammy was flabbergasted. "Why? Why should I go to Yrgritte?"

“He means me.” I said gently.

“Oh!” said Sammy then she reached her hand through the buttons on my shirt and felt my chest “Submissive with a six pack, oh you just keep getting more perfect.”

I could feel my ears burning and carefully pulled her hand free. “Honey, how would you feel if I did that to you?”

She grinned. “Care to find out?”

I looked to Anthony. “You mentioned Yrgritte?”

Anthony snorted. “Follow me, there’s good boy. We’ll have you blissed out in a jiffy.”

“And Sammy?” I asked.

Anthony smiled as tears dried on his face. “It’s been a while, we have catching up to do.”

So we walked to Yrgritte, she was looking up exotic seafood recipes that involved fish that were cooked and eaten while still alive.

“Oh, sorry.” She said. “I was just trying to find a recipe that would be suitably exploitative of Lisa.” Then she noticed who was with us and squealed. “Sammy!?”

Sammy ran into her arms. “Hey, Yrgritte, did you miss me?”

Yrgritte kissed her forehead and said. “You are going swimming with me, you understand? Then I am taking you clothes shopping.”

Sammy grinned. “Should I take that as a yes?”

“Of course, I’ve missed you.” said Yrgritte, squeezing Sammy so tight she was struggling to breathe. Yrgritte looked to Anthony “What made you change your mind?”

“Steve’s going to be joining her as a toy.” said Anthony as he looked to me. “Well a version is, this one is going back to the Contravoxai to be with his Sammy.”

“Oh, bless...” said Yrgritte as she pulled me into the hug as well.

“I need time to work things out.” said Anthony carefully. “I was wondering if you could ensure our little hero didn’t do anything rash?”

“Of course.” said Yrgritte sweetly. “It would be my pleasure.”

Anthony nodded and left.

“Can I watch?” asked Sammy curiously.

“Of course” said Yrgritte, ruffling her hair.

Then Yrgritte’s hands started stroking and massaging me and I transcended to a higher plane of bliss.

*

I woke naked in a cage. Lucy and Amy were lying the floor beside the cage quietly exploring their bodies.

I coughed.

Amy said. “I think your owner wants us to stop.”

Lucy sighed then kissed Amy’s belly button before rolling onto her back to look at me in the cage. “You’re going to make me leave, Amy aren’t you?”

“You could stay?” I suggested.

Amy laughed. “He just doesn’t understand, does he?”

“Well he’s only been a pet himself for a little bit.” said Lucy then she looked to me. “But no, you don’t understand, Steve, I’m your pet. I don’t leave you. Friends fall out, couples divorce, children leave home and toys get left to rot in cupboards but pets are until death or something almost as tragic. I am not ever going to leave you.”

“Sorry.” I said awkwardly. “But I need to be with Sammy.”

Lucy sighed. “I know, she saved you and you saved her so now you’re going to roll into town like a big damn hero.”

“Are you going to tell him?” asked Amy seriously.

“No.” said Lucy bluntly.

“We should tell him.” said Amy firmly.

“But I don’t want it influencing him.” said Lucy seriously.

“He has a right to know.” said Amy earnestly.

“Fine.” said Lucy irritably. “I’ll tell him.”

“Tell me what?” I asked curiously.

“I’m pregnant.” said Lucy with a sigh.

“And so am I.” said Amy happily.

“Err... how?” I asked.

“Well, we like each other.” said Lucy slowly. “We’ve spent a lot of time together, enjoying each other’s company, while naked and very very happy...”

“I mean, how do two eggs make one fertilised one?” I said pointedly.

Amy sighed. “We’re Sylphs and Sylphs are technically speaking an artificially created super species of genetic packaging designed to help any species survive through being exploited. Females being able to reproduce without the need for men and properly reshuffle the genes is just more efficient and a better fall back for a species desperate to survive. I will have to give birth the traditional human way but lucky miss pure blood here can just lay a couple of eggs.”

“You mean you’re going to lay an egg that’s not just a clone but a proper child?” I said.

Lucy nodded.

Amy laughed bitterly. “I get nine months of blowing up like a balloon followed by twenty years supporting this child. She gets a quick sit down followed by a couple of months of raising then it will be fully mature.”

“You’re going to be a Grand Master.” said Lucy gently. “How do you feel about that?”

“I feel like you are staying here, at least until it’s safe on the Contravoxai ship.” I said bluntly.

Lucy sighed. “Fair enough but don’t get yourself killed.”

“Speaking of which...” said Amy quietly. “Here comes her benevolence.”

The cage door was opened and I crawled out then stood up.

Yrgritte looked gravely serious. “He’s ready for you, go have a shower and get dressed.”

“Are you alright?” I asked.

“He’s just told me what you intend to do.” said Yrgritte quietly. “How would you feel if you found out Lucy was going to do that?”

“Point taken.” I said then I left for my shower.

*

I exited the shower, wearing a tuxedo, and found Yrgritte waiting for me.

“You look good.” she said.

“This isn’t my usual suit.” I said.

“No.” said Yrgritte. “But one must always dress for the occasion.”

“Fair enough.” I said.

Yrgritte led me into the hall of heroes once more by the time where the strange blonde woman statue had been there was a fridge.

“Enter.” said Yrgritte.

I nodded then I turned and said. “I know I probably don’t need to ask this but can you look after Lisa and the hatchling, in case anything happens?”

“Of course.” said Yrgritte then she threw her arms about me and said. “You teach those Contravoxai the folly of invading Earth, yeah?”

I nodded. “I’ll do my best”

Then I turned and entered the fridge.

Inside was a dimly lit control room. There were cries of pain coming from the darkness so I ran towards it and found Lisa lying on a plastic sheeting covered table as Anthony stood over her. Her torso had been sliced open and the skin flaps were held back by metal clamps as Anthony placed objects inside of her.

“And we’re done.” said Anthony as he removed the clamps and folded the skin flaps back down where they healed almost instantly. “Sorry the anaesthetic wouldn’t work?”

“Are you kidding?” said Lisa incredulously. “I haven’t felt this great in a long time.”

“What in the ever loving fuck were you just doing!?” I asked.

“Turning your delightful friend into a very useful storage device.” said Anthony casually. “Go have a shower, Lisa. Remember we want you to look completely unblemished and unmodified.”

Lisa nodded and got up off the table then disappeared into the darkness.

I stared at Anthony. “An explanation, please?”

“You had a gun with you when you arrived, remember?” asked Anthony.

“Yeah, what of it?” I asked.

“My analysis shows it can kill a Contravoxai if used at point blank range.” said Anthony carefully. “That means you need some way to get it close.”

“I thought I could just materialise before him.” I said.

Anthony laughed. “The Bam-Kursh got to take me as her toy because the Contravoxai traded her knowledge of my genetic code in return for her ensuring such attacks were not possible. Didn’t want me double crossing them at the last minute. You will need to get to the great Leader, the same way you did, the first time. I’ve also seen to tightly pack a suit into her chest as well.”

“I thought you weren’t going to help me kill?” I said pointedly.

Anthony sighed. “Utilitarian morality. I can’t just stand by and let you find a way to blow up the whole damn ship if I can help you cleanly end one life instead.”

“Okay...” I said curiously. “And what of Sammy? Is my end of the bargain being held up?”

“Yes.” said Anthony with a nod. “But she will expect payment, you have to sacrifice a friend to join her toy range.”

“Right...” I said uncertainly.

Then Anthony strode over to a different part of the central room, his hands somehow becoming immaculately clean as he walked.

“This-” He said, indicating a glass bottle filled with blue liquid. “ Will turn whoever you wish like me. They’ll know just enough to avoid doing anything dangerous with their powers at first but they must be taught by a mortal they trust with the knowledge contained in this memory gun round.” He indicated the round.

I nodded. “Giving the rebels an edge?”

“I can’t turn against the Contravoxai, they have too many things that are precious to me.” said Anthony bluntly. “This will give the rebels someone with no such restrictions, if, that is, talking can’t prevail first.”

Then Anthony walked over to a large crate and pulled out a small squirming creature. “This is an Albino Sylph Squirrel. It is a biological machine. It doesn’t need food and can reproduce asexually. With these and your own blood you can give the Contravoxai enough people like Lisa to avoid the need for anyone dying as part of their meals.”

Finally Anthony walked over to a different table. “And this is so you don’t need me to give you any more lifts after this one.” He said as he hefted up a large futuristic gun.

“A logic lance!” I cried enthusiastically.

Anthony nodded. “Just choose your ride carefully, they’ll technically be more powerful than even me.”

I grinned. “You know I might not actually die.”

“Good luck.” said Anthony before he headed to the controls.

*

Anthony materialised us at the coordinates listed on Charlotte’s business card and I strode out the meet her.

Charlotte said. “You’re not going to believe this but you dropped someone and a logic lance off a while

ago and insisted I disable the camouflage circuitry of the resultant Seghat and leave it disguised as a British post box."

"Ah." I said. "I precede myself, well that saves time."

The supplies for the mission were moved aboard the new seghat then we took off in it. The we being of course I, Lisa and Charlotte.

*

We materialised before the bar and I stepped out of the Seghat.

I juggled three Albino Sylph Squirrels with my hands.

Helga greeted me with a Cheshire cat smile. "Steven, you're back but I'm afraid you're too late. Roxy and Fiora met their end in Merle's stomach as I had planned."

"Where's Eliza?" I asked.

"Handcuffed to my bed." said Helga with a smile. "She is a sweet girl."

I nodded politely and scoured the bar, I found Annabelle and Gerald sitting at a table.

"We're next." said Gerald with a note of certainty in his voice.

Annabelle was more hopeful. "Maybe not, she could favour somebody else."

"Come with me if you want to live." I said.

"Are you serious?" asked Gerald.

"Today is not a day for joking." I said.

"Annabelle? Shall we?" asked Gerald.

"Lets." said Annabelle.

The man and woman rose from their seats to follow me. I tossed each of them an Albino Sylph Squirrel then headed to Helga's room.

The Quantum Oscillator unlocked the door and freed Eliza from her bonds easily.

Eliza looked up from her rather compromised position and muttered with bafflement. "Steven?"

"Sorry to interrupt your umm... Recreational activities but I need you." I said. "These two are the first of many new pets that you will have."

Gerald stared at me. "Pets?"

I nodded and hurriedly brewed up the requisite potions to turn Gerald and Annabelle into basic Sylphs. “Look Eliza in the eyes and drink this.” I instructed.

When they finally did as I instructed I sliced the palm of my hand open then sliced the palms of their hands open so I could mix my blood with theirs.

“Congratulations.” I said. “You are now both sane weresharks and functionally immortal. Eliza, follow me.”

I snatched up the Albino Sylph Squirrels from Gerald and Annabelle and walked out the door.

Eliza followed but was clearly bewildered. “Look, what is this about?”

“Revolution.” I said.

I stared Helga down silently as Eliza entered the Seghat.

Eliza stared around at the vast interior. “It’s bigger on the inside!”

I nodded and started attending to the controls.

Eliza saw Lisa and Charlotte and smiled. “Lisa, you’re back?”

Lisa was wearing a short skirt and a blouse. She grinned at Eliza. “When this is over do you think I could have a spitroast?”

Eliza laughed and stroked her then asked. “Charlotte, why haven’t you attended to her? The girl clearly needs a good eating.”

“Oh, she’s going to get one.” I said with a smirk. “But first we’re going to kill the Great Leader of the Contravoxai.”

Eliza stared at me. “You’re not serious.”

“I absolutely am.” I said ttthen I strode out the open doors of the Seghat.

Eliza followed and asked. “Where is this place?”

“Merle’s dirty little secret.” I said, indicating the foyer of his Seghat. Then I spotted him rushing in the door and asked. “Isn’t that right?”

Merle nodded. “It’s true, Eliza, this ship is my Seghat and now I’m going to help Steve overthrow the government.”

“Show me Roxy and Fiora.” I said.

Merle nodded and led the way.

“But Roxy and Fiora are dead.” said Eliza bluntly. “I saw you eat them.”

“Indeed I did.” said Merle curtly. “I knew they would not be safe until I had eaten them. Helga was so defiant that you would not show her up.”

I snorted.

“You tore them limb from limb!?” said Eliza incredulously.

“Absolutely.” said Merle.

“You ate their internal organs!?” said Eliza.

“Indeed, I did.” confirmed Merle.

“You lowered them screaming into your stomach acid until they fell silent!?” said Eliza.

“How right you are.” said Merle.

“Then how can Roxy and Fiora be still alive?” asked Eliza.

“Because I have had a lot of practise.” said Merle and we crashed through a set of double doors into Merle’s Intensive Care Unit.

Merle indicated Roxy and Fiora. I hurriedly mixed my blood with theirs and proceeded to do the same for all the survivors.

Merle had done a real expert job on Roxy and Fiora they were barely scalps and hearts. No wonder Eliza had been so convinced they were dead.

Eliza was horrified.

“They’re alive.” said Merle gently. “And all sedated, they don’t feel any pain.”

Eliza didn’t care.

“Right...” I said as I clapped my hands together decisively. “I am going to materialise my ship at the exact same place and more or less the same time but five feet to the left. I suggest you hide yours somewhere for twenty four hours then meet us there.”

“Smart plan.” said Merle.

I and Eliza strode back to my Seghat and as we walked I explained how I knew this.

The planned dematerialise and rematerialise five feet to the left worked exactly as I hoped as Merle was waiting for us with Roxy, Fiora and the other Vligury he’d eaten the last year. They were all very naked.

Fiora smiled when she saw me.

Roxy threw her arms around me and said. “I knew you’d comeback, I just knew.”

I laughed and ruffled her hair. “We can talk later, yeah?”

Roxy nodded and went to stand with Fiora.

“Ladies, gentlemen, and those not so easily defined, you are lucky, you have been saved from the pit of Oblivion!” I said. “But it is not without cost! You are Eliza’s property now! You will be eaten by Merle and others until the end of time! Right now though you have a chance to stop others from suffering the fates you did! Obey Merle today and the harvest of your children will end!”

Fiora clapped then Roxy clapped then others joined in.

As Eliza, Merle, Roxy, Fiora and the other survivors talked, I started brewing up basic Sylph potions.

Roxy waved to Eliza. “Hi.”

Eliza was horrified. “I sent you to your deaths.”

“We forgive you.” said Fiora cheefully. “And I liked it actually.”

Roxy nodded. “It was a good death.”

Eliza hugged them.

I handed her 2 glasses of an atrocious smelling liquid.

“These would be for you I believe.” said Eliza with a grimace. “Your wereshark madness cure. Just remember to look me in the eyes as you drink them.”

Fiora nodded and took her glass. “On three, Roxy?”

“On three” agreed Roxy as she tookg her glass.

They counted down together:

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

Then they knocked back the noxious liquid and stared at Eliza.

“Congratulations.” said Eliza with a smile. “I now pronounce you my pet cattle.”

Fiora snorted.

Roxy seemed quite enthusiastic about the idea. “We could get spitroasted?”

Fiora said wryly. “I can think of funner ways to spitroast you.”

Roxy snorted.

I handed Eliza another couple of potions and she imprinted herself on the next two survivors and so the process continued on and on until they were all cured of the wereshark madness and imprinted on Eliza.

“Right...” I said “I am going to leave you with a huge crate of Albino Sylph Squirrels. Go out into the Vligury city and the great sorting pens and infect as many people as possible with the wereshark virus then cure them of its madness.”

Merle nodded. “We will not let you down, Steven.”

“Good luck.” said Roxy with a nod.

I nodded “Thank you.”

I headed back into my Seghat and Eliza followed.

Eliza asked. “So what happens now?”

I started working the controls and explained. “I will drop you and Lisa off because someone needs to ensure that Lisa is hung on the opposite side of the room from me and you are the best for the job. Then I will join one of the big harvest cages and Charlotte will park the Seghat somewhere safe then head to the eating hall for the big kick off.”

We came to a rest and I said. “One small thing first though?” I handed her the bottle of blue liquid “Drink this.”

Eliza stared at me then she shrugged and drained the bottle. “Come on, Lisa, lets get you strung up.”

Lisa giggled and followed Eliza out the door.

I started on the controls again.

Charlotte said. “Look, Steve, I don’t know if I am ever going to get another chance to say this so I’m just going to say it and I’m really sorry. I have fantasized about eating you alive ever since we met and now you’re cured of your wereshark madness... Look, I just - I want to eat you and I am so sorry because that is so weird but there we are. I want to eat you and I hope you want to be eaten by me.”

I finished materialising the ship and said. “Charlotte, you’re very brave and I care a good deal about you but it’s show time. Park the ship, yeah?”

Charlotte nodded. “I know, I’m sorry.”

I sighed and realised I was still wearing my tuxedo, I’d stick out like a sore thumb in this so I said. “Tell you what, as time is of the essence, strip me.”

Charlotte perked up and, with a speed and finesse I would not have thought possible, she stripped me completely naked.

As I exited the Seghat I heard her say. “One day, my love.”

*

I entered the cage for the damned waiting to die and I started infecting people with my blood. I let some know that I was giving them hope, that my blood would make them immortal, that they should infect others and spread the word. Others I just silently infected to be timebombs waiting to go off. A swift death in these cages was preferable to living to be eaten alive.

Then I saw him. Tall, dark and muscley. He approached me silently with the rope and I came quietly. You see I’m not important. I’m not a hero. I am a piece of hay that became a needle and now was my time to strike. Nobody remembered me, nobody knew my face or my name, nobody knew I had already died.

I was led along and strung upside down, above the mouth of a Contravoxai below.

I checked my surroundings. Lisa was armless, earless and eyeless as she hung above a dinner table opposite. Charlotte sat at the table beneath Lisa. The Great Leader was eating Anthony like one might sip a bitter from an independent brewery and I saw to my satisfaction that the Sammy, Lisa, Lucy and Carla who constituted his usual banquet were patiently waiting their turn, I looked around for Amy and spotted a discarded torso lying by the floor of the great Leader’s throne, its head just a mess of ginger hair.

Merle entered.

The Great Leader stood up and cried. “Mage! What brings you here at this time of dining!?”

Merle bowed his head then said hurriedly. “My Lord, I really must recommend that you make some concessions to the Vligury. You cannot keep treating them like this and just expect them to lie down and take it.”

The Great Leader laughed. “My dear, Merle, the Vligury are treated far better than our own kin.”

“Sir, you eat them alive.” said Merle pointedly.

“They like it!” cried the Great Leader to the laughter of the Contravoxai present. “The poor things practically fall over themselves in their desire to enter our cooking pots!”

“Then why are so many Contravoxai starving to the point of cannibalism?” asked Merle bluntly.

“They are lazy.” said the Great Leader. “There is plenty of food available, they merely have to work for it.”

Merle was getting desperate. “Then what of the Earths? Anthony told you they were defended.”

“Are they?” asked the Great Leader, to the guffawing of the Contravoxai present. “Then where are these great heroes of which he spoke?”

Merle sighed.

I pulled myself free of my bonds and hurled a knife at the rope holding Lisa aloft. We fell at the same instant and I sprinted over to her fallen body, I sliced Lisa’s chest open and pulled out the gun and a strange pod with a single button on it. I pressed the button and the pod disappeared as I found I was instantly wearing a three piece suit with a bowtie.

I charged over to address the Great Leader as Charlotte hurriedly disposed of Lisa.

“You want heroes!?” I cried furiously. “You want to see that Earth is defended!? Well I have some fucking news for you sunshine!? I am Steven Arthur Banks and this is a plasma rifle! It can disintegrate a Contravoxai at a hundred yards and right now my contacts are flooding the undercity with these! Oh and something else! The Albino Sylph Squirrel and the blood of a wereshark! A potent combination, wouldn’t you agree!? After all, all you eat are weresharks!”

“Don’t shoot!” cried the Great Leader nervoously. “Don’t shoot! I don’t want to die!”

“Neither did I!” I cried. “Neither did any member of my planet! The Vligury may accept a short life expectancy in return for a cushy lifestyle in the interim but Humans are much more emotive creatures!!!”

I pressed the barrel of the plasma rifle against his skin, I couldn’t miss at this range, even if someone tried to knock it out of my hand or cut my hand off.

“Please!? Please!? Please, I don’t want to die!?” begged the Great Leader.

“Not so funny when you’re for the chop is it!?” I snarled. “Do you know what we Humans do to Kings and Emperors and Dictators who get on the wrong side of their people!?”

“No!” screamed the Great Leader desperately. “No, I don’t!”

“Well either they retire and let democracy reign or they die!” I explained loudly. “I am no hero, Oh Great Leader! I am no martyr! I am not special! I am just one of oh so many people who does not like being eaten alive and will gladly pay the ultimate price to end that suffering!!!”

The Great Leader was a wreck now. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m so so sorry! Please!? Just let me live!?”

“Okay.” I said quietly “Do you abdicate?”

“What!?” screamed the Great Leader, not comprehending.

“You may live if you cease to be Leader!” I cried. “Leave the throne and live!!!”

The Great Leader stared at me and understood now, really understood. Now he was brave. He swallowed and calmed his nerves then said loudly and calmly “No! No, I will not concede political power to avoid my death! What precedent would that set!? To have my species descend into a blood

thirsty war for power is not worth my life!"

I shrugged. "Viva la revolution!"

"No." said a voice beside me, a very familiar voice. Her hands grabbed my arms and she said. "Look me in the eyes, Steven. Look me in the eyes and know that I don't want him to die and I especially don't want you to kill him."

Sammy stood before me, she pleaded with me not to kill the monstrous head of the Contravoxai machine.

"I fancy the fuck out of you, okay?" said Sammy desperately. "It's why I saved your life. Maybe I was wrong, maybe I should have let you die. If you know anything about me, if you care the slightest iota about me, you won't kill the man who makes me so very happy."

"He eats you alive..." I said incredulously.

"And I like it." She said earnestly. "Please, just, don't kill him. Let him live for me."

The Great Leader wafted a gentle tentacle down to her shoulder. "Oh, Sammy. You don't have to do this."

"I wanted you to live." said Sammy seriously. "I wanted you to love me, I never wanted you to kill anyone."

"Fuck." I said quietly. "Sammy, I don't get to get out of this alive, you know? You just don't recover from trying to assassinate a political leader."

"I know." said Sammy with a nod. "I saved your life and clearly I was wrong to. Will you die for me now?"

I tried to ignore her, tried to focus on the Great Leader but how could I shoot dead a noble man who was willing to die for political stability, a man who was a wreck that had begged for mercy and a man that the love of my life would rather I was dead than that I hurt.

"Remember me." I said then I cried out "Remember me!"

I lowered the gun, I lowered the gun and walked away and then I was torn apart by tentacles and felt myself suffocate in burning acid. Then I felt nothing and saw nothing until consciousness itself ceased to be.

*

I woke up to find myself naked on the floor of my Seghat with Lisa beside me.

Charlotte was looking over us.

I laughed bitterly. "Oh, I cocked that up."

Charlotte said with a rather embarrassed tone of voice. “I had to eat you to save your life. I had to make it look authentic.”

I sighed. “It’s fine.” and then I said. “Actually, this is a time machine so fuck it, eat me.”

Charlotte recoiled. “Are you alright?”

“Sammy just told me she would rather I was dead that the Great Leader.” I said with a scowl. “Bit of a bruised ego but fuck it, if Lisa can do it, if Sammy can do it, if you want me to do it, then fuck it, lets do it.”

Charlotte squeed with excitement and her tentacles encircled then scooped me up and lifted me to the vertical.

“So?” I asked. “How does this work?”

“You trust me and look pretty as I have my fun.” She said sweetly. “But I’ll try to be quick as it’s your first time.”

“And then you have Lisa for dessert” I asked.

Charlotte chuckled and I felt her tentacles tighten about me then... Pop!

Charlotte showed me my severed hands and feet. “There, now that wasn’t so bad was it?”

She tipped my hands and feet into her mouth and moaned. “Very nice. Now we’re going to the lower arms and lower legs. This will hurt, a lot, but that’s... Well the other’s seem to like it.”

So then the pressure started on my elbows, building quickly as I could feel bones cracking. I wanted to scream out because it was just so unbearable and then I understood... As the pain crossed some intangible threshold, I started to feel it as something sexual, a building erotic pressure. Painful yes, always painful but the pain was surpassed and muted. I started moaning with delight then... Snap!

Charlotte held my lower arms and lower legs before me and said. “Now that reaction was certainly rather different.”

“Yes.” I said. “I’m rather afraid I liked that quite a lot.”

“Okay...” said Charlotte with carefully muted excitement before pouring my lower arms and lower legs into her mouth and savouring the taste. “Oh yes, I certainly like you. This one I will try to make painful, seeing as you seem to like it.”

I swallowed then nodded. My arms and legs were wrenched from their sockets and torn from my flesh as I cried out in ecstasy.

Charlotte giggled. “I think we may have a convert here.”

This time though she just ate what was left of my arms and legs with out comment or display.

“What happens next?” I asked.

“Dessert.” she said with a chuckle.

I wondered what she meant then I understood as her tentacles swarmed me. My eyes were plucked out and my ears were torn off. My tongue, lower jaw and throat were ripped out. My liver, kidneys, lungs and appendix were pulled from my chest. Even my genitals were taken. It was an overwhelming experience and by a long way painful enough for my Sylph brain to reinterpret the experience as a deeply pleasurable and erotic one.

I woke in a much similar position, on the floor of the Seghat beside Lisa, with Charlotte looking over us.

“How do you feel?” asked Charlotte softly.

“Like I wanna do that again.” I said with barely restrained excitement in my voice before I added. “Just to check, you know?”

Charlotte chuckled. “Alright, just to check, I think I might like to put her on a marinade and you in a soup.”

“Okay...” I said slowly. “Where are you going to find the facilities to do that?”

“My kitchen.” said Charlotte cheerfully. “We are in a Seghat after all.”

So Charlotte led me and Lisa into her kitchen.

She instructed me to climb into a pot that she filled with water and left to boil on a suitably sized hob while she saw to Lisa.

I found myself laughing at how my life kept getting weirder and weirder until Charlotte came in the room and pulled out my tongue to silence me. She chopped strange fruit, veg and herbs to add to the soup then stabbed me a few times to get my blood flowing into the soup. She ate me in silence and it was one of the most surreal yet pleasurable experiences I had to that point experienced. Five minutes ago I was leading a revolution and now here I was in a pot of soup on a kitchen table, bleeding and being slowly eaten alive as Charlotte carved gobbets of meat from my legs, torso and arms.

Finally Charlotte finished eating what she could of me and left me to sit in the pot and recover as she went to devour the marinaded Lisa.

It was all so... Dull. Just sitting a pot of slowly cooling soup, waiting to heal.

Once Charlotte had finished devouring Lisa, she carried the remains of us into the Seghat and disappeared into the bowels of the ship. She returned with a smart suit for me and a short skirt and shirt for Lisa.

Charlotte yawned and asked. “So do you think you like being eaten then?”

My tongue had regrown so I said. “Yeah, this bit’s a bit boring but the actual eating is fun.”

“Okay...” said Charlotte gently. “Then maybe we can do this again sometime? Only next time I’ll find us a show to watch while you heal.”

Hours passed until I and Lisa had finally recovered enough to have a shower and get dressed. Charlotte parked the Seghat and we got out.

*

I walked out the Seghat to find David eating soup as Sammy sat beside him wearing a gorgeous dress. Carla sat to his other side in a matching but different coloured dress.

Lisa ran to Carla.

I approached Sammy.

Charlotte introduced herself to David.

“Sammy, Hi.” I said.

Sammy hugged me and whispered. “Sh! Don’t speak, just hold me.”

So I held her and I felt overjoyed to have her so close, to know that she - My Sammy. - still liked me.

Carla and Lisa were already making out.

Charlotte said. “So, me and Steve, we’re sort of tight you know and Lisa is just adorable but they sort of need their other halves, so I wondered how you felt about getting to know each other?”

David chuckled and shook tentacles with Charlotte. “Tell you what? Things are kind of hairy right now, if you’ve got a Seghat we could find somewhere nice to get away to then have a nice a romantic meal of these couples you seem to care about?”

Charlotte chuckled. “Sounds weirdly sweet that.” Then she was hit by a bolt of realization. “We could make it a tripple date? Let them each share a romantic meal together before, or even as we have a romantic meal of them.”

David smirked. “That is one wicked sense of humour you’ve got there. You’re on.”

Helga came to gloat. “Your revolution failed, Steve, and what’s more that girl and boy you thought you saved have just been eaten by David.”

“Nah.” said David as he lifted Gerald and Annabelle’s heads and torsos from his soup. “They’re fine.”

“Why?” asked Helga “You didn’t know?”

“I did.” said Sammy gleefully. “I never gave up on you, Steve. I always knew that you would return for me. That you would bring the Vligury the cure.”

“Except you did give up on him.” said Helga gleefully. “Your preference to see Steve dead instead of the Great Leader is why the Great Leader still lives.”

“Aww...” said Sammy sweetly. “You were willing to die and abandon revolution for that me?”

I nodded then said “Sort of discovered you’ve got a point too, since I like being eaten. Charlotte helped me find out.”

Sammy grinned. “Oh we must get eaten together, we simply must.”

I laughed. “Alright but first I have to tell you something, I think I love you.”

Sammy chuckled. “I know and I love you, always have. You just didn’t ask.”

Eliza entered with Fiora and Roxy.

Helga stared at them. “They’re dead. What are they doing alive?”

Eliza shrugged. “What matters is that they belong to us now and they will gladly be eaten by any passing Contravoxai.”

“Really?” asked Helga curiously.

“Really.” said Eliza cheerfully before she reached out for Roxy by way of demonstration and casually cut her arms and legs off in turn then placed them on the bar.

Roxy sighed.

Eliza said. “Here, pluck out her eyes. She’s fine with it.”

Helga tentatively reached out with a knife and removed Roxy’s eyes then said. “Would you look at that, we’ll make a fortune off her.”

“And from Fiora, and Gerald and Annabelle and at least eight others.” said Eliza with a grin.

Helga grinned. “We’re rich!”

Fiora approached us and said. “Look, I know it didn’t go as well as we wanted but the Albino Sylph Squirrels and wereshark blood is in circulation now, plus we owe you our lives so anytime you want us, just ask.”

“Actually...” said Charlotte thoughttfully. “You and Roxy are a couple aren’t you? How do you feel about joining us for a romantic meal of couples having romantic meals?”

Roxy asked. “Are you going to do anything with my arms and legs because I’m fairly certain they will reattach?”

Merle said. “If there’s arms and legs going begging, I am feeling a bit peckish after all that exertion.”

Eliza chuckled. “Of course” She chucked Merle Roxy’s arms and legs.

Merle eagerly snatched them up and devoured them before he approached the bar. “And are those her eyes?”

Eliza nodded. “Take them.”

“Why, thank you.” said Merle as he snatched up Roxy’s eyes. He asked “Is there any chance you could put her in a broth for me? Seems a shame to waste the rest of her.”

“For you Merle, anything” said Helga cheerfully as she scooped up Roxy.

Merle turned to address me.

“I know, I fucked up.” I said quietly.

“Au Contraire, my dear boy, you’ve quite won us the revolution.” said Merle cheerfully.

“How? I fucked it all up, I nearly got Lisa killed, nearly got myself killed and the political structure continues.” I said irritably.

Merle shook his head. “If you had killed him, or even if he’d abdicated at the barrel of a gun, all you would have done is create a power vacuum which could well be filled by someone worse. Instead you showed that the Great Leader is not invulnerable, you showed that Humans and Vligury are not without strength and you showed that is the morsels that have the power. The Great Sammy, the epitome of playing with your food, she saved the Great Leader’s life and not with violence but words. And I will continue the revolution itself by arming the populace with the immortality granted by being Sylph Weresharks and this too shall get the revolution among the lower Contravoxai classes going as the poor and the needy can have the food to eat and fight back. The structure will be reformed.”

Helga returned with a thick broth made from Roxy. “Here you go, Merle.”

“Oh fantastic!” said Merle as he accepted the broth.

Fiora looked sadly at her best friend and lover.

“Jealous?” asked Merle curiously.

“Just a bit.” said Fiora awkwardly. “Don’t like not being with her, you know?”

“Then I shall have to make sure I eat you afterwards.” said Merle with a chuckle.

Charlotte sighed. “Oh, you know I think we might have to cut our losses with Fiora and Roxy for now.”

David nodded then turned to Sammy and asked “Me and Charlotte here are thinking of having a romantic meal so we might get to know each other, wondered if you and Stevie boy would mind being the main.”

Sammy looked to me. “What do you think?”

I shrugged.

A victorian adventuress suddenly stood beside me and said. “Yes, what do you think of being eaten alive with your dear precious, Sammy? You’re so wretchedly cute together it makes me want to vomit. You know he elected to have himself made into a toy, so that all the little toy Sammys wouldn’t have to be alone. Despicable bastard.”

Sammy snorted then said. “That is actually rather unbelievably sweet.”

I shrugged. “You’re here for your payment, aren’t you?”

The Bam-Kursh nodded. “However could you guess? Of course I want my fucking payment, so pay up, fucker.”

“Here you are” I said as I indicated Fiora and the broth. “Fiora and Roxy, perfect toys.”

The Bam-Kursh was taken aback. “You’re paying me double?”

I shrugged. “They’re cute together.”

The Bam-Kursh looked at them and sucked her teeth then said. “Yes, they sort of are, aren’t they. Alright, I’ll have to owe you.”

I nodded. “Fine by me”

Then she vanished.

“Actually that reminds me of something.” I said and I pulled a gun out of my pocket and shot Helga between the eyes.

Helga blinked and shook her head then said. “Thank you.”

Eliza looked at me nervously.

Helga looked into Eliza’s eyes and said. “He’s just given me the most wondrous power over you, dear, the knowledge to control your abilities.”

“Oh...” said Eliza with nervous excitement. “So what happens now?”

“You will have to be very obedient...” said Helga as she cleared the hair from Eliza’s face.

“Oh, I am sure.” said Eliza with a smirk. “You might even have to discipline me if I get things wrong?”

Helga smiled.

Eliza returned the smile.

Then David and Charlotte led me, Sammy, Lisa and Carla away.

*

On a distant planet orbiting a binary star system, a table and chairs had been set out in an extension of the Seghat life support forcefield under the stars.

Lisa and Carla were appetisers and to accommodate their position they ate nouveau cuisine before David and Charlotte chowed down on them.

Me and Sammy had more time for our meal but as the main we had to conduct it while seated in mashed potato and gravy and being slowly baked courtesy of a fancy hob. We ate pizza because fuck fancy, we had saved each other's lives.

When we woke the next day Charlotte informed me that there was still one task left to perform...

*

Tipton, West Midlands, Great Britain, Earth, five years before the Contravoxai invaded.

Steven Banks was having an argument with his best friend about him being a crazy loser conspiracy theorist scrounger. The loser's name is Lucas Crichton.

Steven said. "Look, why can't you just be normal?"

"Because I'm not." said Lucas.

"Then take your fucking meds." said Steven.

"I am." said Lucas. "But you can't drug someone normal."

"Oh, you're just not trying hard enough." said Steven and he walked off.

"Well, fuck you then." said Lucas as he gaved his friend two middle fingers before ascending a fire escape outside a building.

He climbed to the top and I was there to meet him.

"How did you beat me, here?" He asked curiously.

"I time travelled." I said casually. "Look, Lucas, I'm a dick, yeah? A complete stonking tool. I'm a fucking Hedgefund Manager for Christ sake! I am a class A bellend but you ain't. You don't have to do this. I'm sorry. You're you and I should never have tried to make you into anything different. I love you, man."

Lucas smirked. "You're punking me ain't you? This is just like that time you pretended to come out to me so you could call me an sjw for not being a twat to you about it."

"Yeah, well if it's any consolation, I'm fairly certain I got my just desserts." I said quietly.

“You know what’s the worst thing?” asked Lucas “You are my best friend and you are a complete dick to me. I don’t get many options so I just smile and accept it. Good old Stevie and his funny funny japes. Like that time you made me believe I was dying of cancer, remember that? You actually kept it up five months after I was supposed to have died?”

I sighed. “Yeah, sorry. Point is mate, I do actually sort of love you in a very real way. I’m just a right prick about it.”

“Yeah, well... That’s not good enough anymore.” said Lucas angrily. “Fuck off!”

“Alright.” I said quietly. “I’m going. Can’t bare to watch this anyway.”

Then I got up and left.

Alone on the rooftop Lucas cried out. “Listen, aliens and eldritch things and all you other zombies, I am not going to die! I am going to throw myself off this roof and then something truly amazing is going to happen because I am not suicidal! I’m perfectly sane! I’m perfectly normal! I am just going to leap off this roof and wake up somewhere magical!”

Then Lucas ran off the roof and fell... Right through the open door of a red British post box and into a pool large enough for a great white shark to comfortably roam. He drowned trying to find his way to air.

*

Lucas woke with a splutter on the floor of the central control room. I held Sammy for emotional support. David and Charlotte watched with nervous interest and Lisa and Carla watched with curiosity.

Lucas sat up and asked. “Where am I?”

“Tell me, what do you know of Quantum Immortality?” I asked.

Lucas got to his feet and surmised. “It’s the theory that states that since you can only experience universes in which you are alive, if you were to riddle yourself with nanotech that automatically killed you given any scenario less then ideal, you would only experience the ideal scenario.”

I nodded. “Very good summary. That’s you.”

“Who are all these people?” asked Lucas.

“Well, those two are polyamorous toys who love to be eaten alive.” I said of Lisa and Carla. “This is the love of my life.” I said of Sammy. “And those two are tentacled man eating aliens called Contravoxai.” I said of David and Charlotte.

Lucas nodded. “May I see a demonstration?”

“Oh, I think we can do that.” I said.

Lisa giggled and took Carla’s hand. “Love you later, honey.”

Carla nodded. “You too, sweetie.”

Then David lifted Carla up into the air and casually devoured her as Charlotte cheerily devoured Lisa.

“No kidding.” said Lucas, impressed. “And they’re not dead?”

“We recover in a day or two” I said.

“We?” He asked.

“See you soon, sweetie.” said Sammy as David and Charlotte lifted her into the air and devoured her between the pair of them.

“Wow.” said Lucas. “Okay, I believe you, so what now?”

I went to the controls and said. “You are the smartest man I know and my best mate, well before all this happened, and that makes you uniquely qualified to travel the stars.”

Lucas asked. “Are you trippin’ mate?”

I shook my head. “You’ll understand, I know you’ll understand because you already have.” Then we landed and I stepped out with Lucas and the logic lance.

Charlotte greeted us. “Steve, you’re back and so soon?”

“Yes.” I said. “But only to deliver this man into your care. He is to become a Seghat you understand, my Seghat. Disable his camouflage circuitry so his exterior remains that of a British Red Post Box. I will arrive when he is ready to be piloted and I will know nothing of this, see that it stays that way.”

Lucas stared at me. “You’re going to turn me into some kind of ship, aren’t you?”

“Is that a problem?” I asked.

“I don’t know.” said Lucas.

“Then I think it’s probably not a problem.” I said.

“Fair enough.” said Lucas. “Until we meet again, old chum.”

I strode back into my Seghat and the welcoming tentacles of David and Charlotte.

*

I woke the next morning on the floor of the Seghat. I showered and got dressed in my suit then I re-enabled the camouflage circuitry and installed the hologram software.

As soon as it had finished installing, a hologram of Lucas appeared beside me and said. “One last stop friend then you can settle down for a bit.”

“I know.” I said. “I just... She hurt me so much, you know?”

Lucas nodded. “Not exactly a stranger to that concept, yeah, but you need to do it.”

*

The Great Leader had gone into hiding with his personal banquet in tow and that meant he was well clear of the no materialization zone.

Sammy lay awake as the others slept, just staring into space.

Then a trapdoor appeared before her.

I crawled out of it.

“You’re alive?” Sammy said, utterly surprised. “But I watched you die?”

“My Contravoxai friend Charlotte is very skilled at making friendly munchings seem terrifyingly fatal.” I explained. “And for what it’s worth I now understand why you want to stay with the Great Leader because I like being eaten too now.”

“Oh, aww.” said Sammy as she pulled me close “My poor baby. You should stay. I’m sure the Leader will forgive you, especially when you let him eat you.”

“Well, that’s handy” I said as I exposed my chest. “Sammy, I love you. Each and every version of you. Where you go, I go. This me can’t stay with you because this me has a different Sammy that he’s very fond of but I only have that Sammy because you decided to save my life and gave me your heart so this is me, returning the favour.”

I sliced open my chest and pulled out my human heart, I cut it free and handed the still beating heart to Sammy. “Look after him and he will look after you.”

Sammy held my heart in her hands and said. “I will treasure him always. Enjoy your Sammy, Steve. She’s a very lucky girl.”

“I know.” I said and I left through the trapdoor again.

My Sammy was waiting for me in the Seghat Control room with the hologram of Lucas.

“Is it done?” She asked. “Will she have a version of you to love?”

I nodded.

Sammy flung her arms around me and kissed my neck.

“I think you should head to Anthony’s.” said Lucas gently. “Your baby’s having a baby.”

Sammy stared at him.

*

We materialised and exited the Seghat in time to watch Lucy's egg hatch.

"It's a girl!" announced Lucas. "Congratulations."

Yrgritte and Anthony were holding each other as Amy and Lucy watched the hatching together.

Lucy looked up at me and said. "Thanks for making it."

"What happened?" asked Yrgritte.

"Oh, that's a long story." I said "But you might want to get the deep fat fryer on, we've got two Contravoxai back there and it's not just Lisa who likes a good eating any more."

Sammy grinned and squeezed my hand. "You're a Grand Master."

Lisa and Carla exited.

"Right, I think I best get cooking." said Yrgritte "Come on girls, lets get you deep fried as soon as possible."

"Deep fried?" asked Carla.

"Oh, it's fantastic." said Lisa as she led the way.

Sammy said. "A deep fry does sound like fun. Do you think you'll be okay on your own for a bit?"

"Of course." I said sweetly. "Go have fun."

Sammy ran off after Lisa, Carla and Yrgritte.

I decided to stay with Lucy and Amy and the hatchling for a bit but I heard Lucas approach Anthony and ask "What do you do when the omniscience gets a bit squick, like say, for example, totally hypothetically, two Contravoxai were getting jiggy with it, right in front of your sensors?"

Anthony chuckled. "Oh, I may have some particularly rare narcotics that can help, if you would like to follow me?"

Lucas followed Anthony.

I was left alone with Lucy and Amy so I asked "What happened to the toys?"

"You arrived." said Amy with a smirk. "Your toy, I mean. You and Sammy go everywhere together and Lisa and Carla go with you. It's quite sickening really. Only Lucy and Amy are free to actually be toys that are played with now. Everyone else is too full of life."

I nodded. "Interesting..."

Lucy asked. “So how long are you going to stay here then?”

I shrugged. “We’ve got a ship that can travel in time and things that can freeze time. No reason we couldn’t continue the old system and still travel, I guess we’ll see how it goes.”

The End

This chronicle is dedicated to the memory of Earth that was and my small impact on Contravoxai/Vligury relations. I know some bits might seem a bit needlessly graphic for a chronicle of events but it is the story of the events themselves that delivers the weight by which people’s minds are charged. The facts on their own without the context of detail and emotion are meaningless or at least that’s my perspective.

I am eighty now but I still look in my early thirties thanks to the whole wereshark thing.

The revolution succeeded, more or less, as we now have an elected parliament with the Great Leader relegated to performing ceremonial functions alone. All sapient cattle including Humans and Vligury now have the right to say no to an offer of being eaten and the further right to choose whether they wish to be eaten as a mortal or as a wereshark.

Eliza and Helga’s little underground pub is now a world famous eating establishment with Lucy, Amy, Fiora, Roxy, Gerald and Annabelle among the top dishes, with new dishes being recruited all the time. They are now paid a wage per customer served, though they regularly offer themselves to homeless Contravoxai as an act of charity with Fiora and Roxy being regular servings at a nearby soup kitchen.

Eliza is now nearly as powerful as Anthony but still plays the subservient to Helga’s vampiricness.

Lisa and Carla are now married but remain as polyamorous and keen to be devoured as ever.

Sammy and I have been married 40 years now and still enjoy being a good romantic meal together.

David and Charlotte do not believe in marriage but they have been together and devouring us almost every day since they began. On their anniversary every year they book tables for me and Sammy, Lisa and Carla, Fiora and Roxy and Gerald and Annabelle then have a long romantic dinner of us as the different courses.

The Bam-Kursh has started selling her toys here and is making a fortune.

My Pet Lucy’s hatchling was named Jessica and she is a trained lawyer but fell for a Contravoxai CEO so now she works in a patent office. It is understood that Jessica’s relationship with the CEO is not nearly as simply described as romantic partners or culinary partners but we love her regardless of her proclivities.

The human child of Amy was named Liara but he came out as transgender at ten and since goes by Liam. He’s a politician pushing for the rights of the Contravoxai lower classes. Ten years ago he got a law passed requiring all Contravoxai to be given access to the same transgender therapies and help as Vligury when formally Contravoxai would have to pay to get treatment.

Lucas has spent a lot of his time searching for technologically advanced extra terrestrial life and slowly upgrading his abilities, Eliza and Anthony have both helped him a great deal in this capacity. It is understood that he has a somewhat physical relationship with Anthony's Seghat and certainly shares a deep spiritual connection with her.

Earth that was is now well and truly gone but enough people survived to impact the Vligury culture. Whether this is a good thing or bad thing has yet to be seen.